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RUSSELL LAMAN

Manifest Destiny

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Author's Note

A few well-known public figures, of prominent roles in the history of the period covered, appear by their names in this book. All other characters are entirely imaginary.

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To
MARI SANDOZ AND HUDSON STRODE

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Book I

Kansas Earth

"In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations."

George Washington
from *The Farewell Address*

Part I — “Go West, Young Man”

Chapter 1

A bleak red sun flat above the morning horizon provided sole evidence of direction in the bigness and eternal sameness of snowy Kansas landscape. Amidst so much space and cold the lone, unpainted frame house high and narrow with smoke whipped from its chimney, stood neither as a challenge nor an incongruity. It appeared simply futile.

Neither did there appear challenge nor promise in the man who stood biting at his short, black mustache, motionless on the steps in his long ulster and cap of the city traveler. He was thin and sallow with too much of thinking in his dark eyes. Out of western Iowa and into Nebraska the previous afternoon he had watched his beloved woods dwindle to struggling growths rooted along creeks and rivers, pitifully barren against the snow; and that night when met at Plainsboro station it had been cloudy dark, obscuring any view at all during the long sleigh ride. Now with a clear sunrise he seemed to have been transported into an immeasurable basin, center to a contour of softly rolling surface flowing outward, rising by gentle incline until bluish white it merged with sky. The scene gripped him, even while its desolation pressed in upon his heart.

The man took a long breath, stepped down to the frozen earth and turned his gaze toward his feet. He kicked backwards with his heel through snow to the soil beneath, a gray-black armor of congealed mud. In this dirt he was supposed to find wealth. John Phillip Garwood, student at law. To the farm from fortune-seeking in the city—to the earth thou shalt return!

The north wind sweeping past in unimpeded haste bit at his ears and cheeks. He turned up his collar to close the space between cap and throat. But a numbness he felt inside him was old and too deep to have been caused by winter snow, as he walked down the slope toward the white mound roof of a dug-in stable and sound of his Uncle Dean York and Cousin Andy feeding cattle and teams. A smell of animal heat without much warmth met his face as he entered the aperture between two upright

poles, and once within the dim interior there was the pungency of urine and manure mixed with rotting straw. Along one side of a central feed-way were the outlines of four horses in stalls munching corn from their feed boxes, and Dean was stuffing their mangers with the same brown grass that thatched the roof. He leaned for a moment on his pitchfork after greeting Phil.

"Fat, aren't they!" he said of the horses which Phil's eyes had not yet adjusted to see clearly. "Some folks think they can winter well enough on good hay alone, but I've always grained my teams even when crops failed and I had to buy. A man that works is entitled to square meals, and I say it's the same with his animals."

He moved to the pile of hay at the other end for another forkful. Phil followed back and forth with him through the task, then around to the other side where the cows were tied. His uncle took down a pail from a wall peg and straddled a stool beside a red heifer. "Got two new ones coming fresh this spring. You can't beat butter and cream."

Andy was already sitting at another cow with his head pressed into her flank, and the bubbly hiss of milk streams cutting through foam came up from the bucket squeezed between his knees. He tilted up sidewise a face with blue eyes and wind-reddened cheeks that showed early scattering of beard, and grinned without breaking the rhythms of his wrists. Phil stood by while they finished, shoulders hunched and miserably chilled, helpless of how to assist.

"It's not many buildings of lumber you'll find hereabouts," Dean said when they were before the house, stamping their boots clean on the doorstep. "Near forty miles to a sawmill, and their boards of native cottonwood are soft and warp; so we had it shipped. Mighty high-priced, and we could only afford two rooms, but it's the solid best." He tapped the sturdy door jam with mittened knuckles. "We'll add on east and west wings when crops pay better. For my part I'd have built a dugout and bought extra land, but Emma wouldn't hear to it. The idea of living in a hole in the ground went against her family grain."

Inside, the morning fire had not yet taken all chill from the air. Dean shook down ashes in the squat heating stove, hustled to the fuel box and back. Phil stared at the armload of great, golden ears of corn as he knelt and began piling them upon the glowing coals.

"My God man—you burn that!"

Andy looked up at the Eastern accent, abruptly from rubbing his hands spread to the heat. In his young gaze there was quest and deference. Dean remained bent to his task. "It's cheaper'n coal," he said, "and there isn't any wood near."

"But people are starving back East."

"So we've heard. Folks out here call it a panic of plenty." Dean rose and likewise spread his hands above the stove. "Plenty of everything except cash to buy things we can't grow."

"Well, I've *seen* it!"

Dean turned and met Phil's accusing gaze directly. Little creases between and above his eyes deepened so that for an instant his face looked strong and kind. "I know you have, son. And it's the same Easterners who fed us when the grasshoppers ate us out. Now we'd send it back fifty times over, but the price won't pay the freight."

Aunt Emma called from the kitchen. Dean motioned Phil to precede them, and he entered in silence. They all sat up to an uncovered table and Dean rubbed his palms together business-like at a towering plate of cornmeal pancakes. He laughed outright at Phil's expression as he tasted his coffee. "It's made from wheat, coarse ground and roasted dark. Now here is something you won't have to learn to like." He handed along a platter of meat.

"Partridge!" Phil said with his first bite.

"Not quite—"

"Prairie chicken," Cousin Andy cut in. "You can shoot them and quail till your shoulder's lame!"

"Andrew is our hunter," Emma said, and a mother's pleasure in complimenting showed in her quiet face.

"There's no place to sell them now, but me and Democrat John Freeman got over five hundred hunting together one year," said Andy.

"John's the only Democrat in the county," Dean explained. "Everybody's Republican out here."

Phil smiled and looked again at the vigorous young face of his cousin. "Will you teach me how to shoot?"

Andy nodded eagerly. "You have to lead 'em far on the wing."

"They're a bigger bird than a partridge, but you'll know one when you see it fly," his uncle said. He began helping himself to food.

As Phil watched first Dean and then Andy stack their plates four deep with the hot, brown cakes—each heavily buttered and drenched with sorghum—pictures poured into his mind of gaunt bodies shivering in street lines for charity soup. He saw again hollow-faced children with noses flattened against the plate glass window of the restaurant in which he had eaten his last meal in the city. He lowered a bite half raised to his mouth, nausea replacing his appetite now as it had then in spite of the gamy flavor of the prairie chicken. He could not bear looking at the table. His gaze traveled about the bare kitchen walls to the one window and

searched far and long into the unbroken distances of snow framed by the casement.

Dean urged him to make out his meal. "You'll need to stoke up. It takes a lot of fuel for a day's work outside in this weather."

In turning to his uncle Phil saw Andy's keen eyes probing the unhappiness in his face and forced a smile. "I guess I haven't got acclimated yet." He made himself return to his food and tried to drive away the street visions by thoughts of his wife and her parents in their snug, Dutch home behind a sugar maple grove in the Catskills. But instead of comfort and security for her there he could remember only their parting at the station. Electra breaking from her mother and running after him across the platform, her steps awkward with pregnancy. The pressure of her arms clutching him. Her pink and white face drawn and working, her blue eyes that wet his coat. "You will send for me, John Phillip—soon, soon!"

Phil continued to nibble with gaze averted from the Yorks in their lusty business of eating. When at last Dean shoved forward his plate, empty except for a pile of clean-picked bones, Phil gratefully laid down his own knife and fork.

His uncle wiped his mouth, pushed back his chair, rubbed his hands again. "Now I'm ready to talk land. How you fixed to buy?"

"I could manage eight hundred dollars," Phil said. "Mostly Electra's bonds." He bit his lip, feeling his face grow warm over his admission. "If I hadn't been a damned fool in the stock market . . ."

"Every man's entitled to a mistake, maybe more than one," Dean said. "Life's long enough. If you hadn't made yours early you wouldn't be here now. Wait till spring comes and you see this soil. Not a rock or stump in a section, and black as a swamp bed!"

Phil listened to a rising tale poured forth of quarter sections by pre-emption and choice school lands appraised for sale at a dollar per acre, of homesteads and timberclaims for only filing fees. Dean's eyes grew excited all the way into their gray depths, but Phil kept seeing another pair of similar eyes, hearing another voice—Thaddeus Anderson steely calm with assurance buying stock on the trading floor. "Take all you can. You'll never see such opportunity but once," Dean urged, and his words were almost exactly Anderson's.

"I didn't come out here to gamble again," Phil told him abruptly. "Not with her savings."

"Gamble? Man, this is sure! Up is the only direction land prices can go. A few years ago you could buy the finest broke acres at four dollars. That's when my boy, Jim, got his. The same farms are worth six today. Invest all the money you've got."

"No," said Phil. "In any case I'll have to keep part back for a place to live. I couldn't risk bringing Electra till I was sure of staying. There'll be a baby by spring."

"Fine! A few dollars for a hillside dugout will do the trick, and that young one'll make it a home. If I could have made Emma listen, we'd be in one like other folks and owning more acres." Dean smiled momentarily and charitably toward his wife. "I can see her point with the years we've got behind us, but you're young."

Fine . . . young . . . !

Uncle Dean leaned forward. "I'll get you fixed up with some good adjoining quarter sections right off while there's choice—before settlers rush in."

Buy stocks. Hurry . . . hurry . . . before they go higher. Mounting rebellion in Phil demanded action to halt this flow of sales talk turned upon him. Yet the same feeling of directionless desperation which had engulfed him following disaster in New York and driven him West still held him impotent.

"You said yourself you had seen first hand how much the cities need our grain."

Seen? Yes, he had said so, and no one had even asked him what. A ringing began in Phil's ears, but words continued to reach him through it.

All this country needed was people, just folks to live in it. They would be coming. Other states were advertising their grants of Kansas school land for sale all over the nation. So were the railroads, and if the government passed the bill to help them operate, the freights would be running again next summer.

"The farmers'll set their own prices, too, when our Granges get better organized."

These last words stung Phil through his thoughts and loosened his tongue in an outburst of voice rising almost to falsetto. "You talk about demanding prices! How do you know that people will ever have jobs and money again!" He threw out both his hands as if to ward off contradiction, an angry movement which set Dean up straight in his chair. "You didn't see the bread riots. You haven't seen men, and women too, sleeping in parks, trying to keep from freezing under newspapers. You've never had to look into faces that made you ask yourself: 'My God, is that a man!'" Phil swept his burning gaze over the three before him. "None of you have seen anything, and yet you would make those people pay . . ." He halted at sight of tears welling into Aunt Emma's bewildered blue eyes. "I'm sorry." His hands dropped abjectly across his lap, clinching and unclenching. "I hope you folks never have to see it. You're not to blame."

"You've no need to apologize," Dean told him.

"I say we are to blame!"

Phil looked at Andy, drawn by the impassioned young voice. In his cousin's face he saw the excoriating indignation of a boy dealing with men's problems.

"We're all part of this government and should do something about such things. A government of the people should not let them starve!"

Dean restrained his son with upraised hand. "That's a big order for the Treasury still three billions in debt on our war with the South. I'm not saying it isn't the right idea, but I reckon we're a long time off from seeing it in practice." He turned slowly back to Phil. "It's no use telling you to forget. When a man goes through the things you have, it becomes a part of him inside, and it will keep coming back to you till you die. But you do have to start again, and here and now is the place—in the land."

Phil tried to receive his uncle's gaze, reaching desperately for a measure of the confidence in the older man. He saw instead only the raw, cruel, measureless plains overflowing himself and Electra even as a roof. "You don't have a child just to brighten a cellar for you." He choked over the words and wretchedly averted his face.

For an interval there was stillness in the room, and then Phil felt the weight of his uncle's hand upon his knee. Dean's voice was still lusty but it was gentle when he said, "I know you didn't want to come out here. You wanted your family to have only the finest."

"I would give my life for their happiness!"

"You can all find that together in the West, son, where a man with your learning can make a name for himself if he's a leader. We're the youngsters in the family of states out here. Kansas is still a baby, and some haven't been born yet. But we'll grow with the nation in the years ahead until someday maybe we will feed the world."

Chapter 2

From either side of the heavy door leading into the hillside, the pane of a half window blazed back red gold of the sun low but not yet setting, and thin smoke barely moved from the pipe protruding above the brown grass sticking up through the snow. The neighbors with teams and tools had gone. Inside was the raw, clean smell of deep, new earth; and Phil was alone for the first time in the first dwelling he had owned.

For an interval after the last departure he stood at the mantel before the wedding tintype of himself and wife. The soft folds of her hair gath-

ered back above her temples and then falling in two braids in front of her slight shoulders made her look more than ever girlish. In the picture her hair and eyes were too dark, but he saw them in the gold and blue that they were. The eyes gazed back at him just as they had when she gave him her first kiss. They were at their spring behind the grove which hid the home of her parents. It was mid-summer, warm and very still under the trees, and he had guided her home by that route purposely from their walk in the woods. He had had to turn her by the hand to stop her there. His mouth was cotton dry when he spoke his love, and he dropped her hand immediately afterwards when she did not look at him. He could see the artery pulsing in her pale throat, but in his own was a hard lump of despair. "I know you're a thousand times too good for me!" he had burst out, his voice sounding violent. "But I had to tell you." Electra had turned to him then fully, both her face and her body; and in her eyes were neither tears nor any shadow of withholding, only great, radiant happiness.

Phil swallowed with difficulty now as he had then. He took her latest letter from his pocket, touched it with his lips, and placed it also on the mantel. He remembered all its contents—her loneliness which he fully shared, her almost fearful wonder for the child stirring within her which he could not share. Phil turned slowly from the picture and moved from point to point aimlessly about the dugout, feeling the void of the interior so recently bursting with warm life. Gathering in with picks and spades, the nearby folks had broken through the frozen crust and in three days established him—even more amazingly swift than his Uncle Dean had promoted him into possession of five hundred acres of prairie by timberclaim, homestead, and purchase of script. More Phil had refused to buy. A real house came first.

On the last day whole families had come, wives bringing baskets of sorghum cake, meat loaf and wild plum preserves. While the men set a stable into the meadow bank below the dugout and the children rolled and snowballed, the women were whitewashing the fire-dried walls of subsoil clay, testing the oven, with calico curtaining the bed. They had shut out the owner while they worked. When at last he was summoned with the other men to view the results and smell the aroma of hot cornbread and baked beans on the loaded table, Cousins Andy and Jim had burst in with a cradle between them, singing "Rock-a-bye Baby."

Now left surrounded by a cookstove a-gloss with polish, by proper shelves with pots, pans and dishes, Phil did not see the earthen floor. Instead he saw the borders of crocheted lace on the window curtains; and from the depth of his gratitude to the unknown donor, arose the wonder

that the red, roughened hands of any of the women could have fashioned such a miracle. When I write to-night, he thought, I must tell Electra how generous and kindly these plains' wives were.

Phil went to the window, parted and gently pushed aside those curtains to the casings for a full view across the unbelievable expanse of acreage. It was his. The first completed document lay folded on the table, brought by Jim York from the post office that morning—ink and parchment bearing the official pen-drawn seal of County Register of Deeds and signatures. He went to the paper and took it up, held tightly in both hands, and read silently, yet hearing every word.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

. . . in Pursuance of the Act of Congress . . . there has been deposited in the General Land Office Script No. 1307, for one quarter section . . . duly assigned to John Phillip Garwood . . . located upon the South East Quarter, of Section Nine, in Township Six South of Range Two West, "in the District of Lands Subject to Sale at Plainsboro, Kansas."

Now know ye. That the United States of America have Given and Granted . . . the Said Tract . . . unto John Phillip Garwood.

The parchment crackled in the pinch of Phil's fingers on the margins; print blurred and page receded in his gaze as he neared the end. His eyes grew wide in a glazed stare without focus, while his body stiffened to the nightmare which came surging back. He was once again on the packed floor of the Stock Exchange that fatal morning of September 14th. Around him in the cages which house priority keys were piles of telegrams beside operators with strained, frightened faces working furiously against backlogs. In his ears rang the unnaturally loud cries of bewildered and shuttling delivery boys with hands full of yellow envelopes as they squirmed under arms and between men's legs. "Paging Mr. Doane, Mr. Doane. Mr. Orthwaite, Mr. Browning, Mr. Allen, Mr. Stevey, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Lee." The stir and roar of the Exchange swallowed them up. It was not so much actual noise as an omnipotence in the air. Like the calm in the eye of a storm before its coming fury, it pressurized the trading room awaiting the gong, and a voice had cut like a blade through its clang.

"Sell 500 Birmingham Coal and Coke at fifty." On top of the offer fell a competitor's: "Sell 300 Birmingham at 48!"

Pittsburgh Foundries at 43, at 40, at 38. Ontario Canal, Pennsylvania Fuels, New York Construction, Indiana Lumber, New England Cloth and Leather. Sell! Sell!

At recording boards stood the clerks frantically trying to chalk up

changing figures, while the lots grew to 1,000, 2,000, then 3,000 shares until blocks of 10,000 were being dumped. The waving fists and crazed screaming voices of hundreds of men, struggling and trampling one another to get to the front. "Sell at the market! Sell at the market!" And no one knew what the market had become. Then the executive order, closing the Exchange.

The moment of awful silence following its announcement brought Phil back to the present. He was breathing hard and put a hand to the hewed table to steady himself. He shook his head, clearing away dizziness that had engulfed him and tasted salt of blood on his tongue where his teeth had bitten his lip. He looked again at the document he clutched.

"... unto John Phillip Garwood and to his Heirs and Assigns Forever."

Affixed below in clear black ink was the signature: Rutherford B. Hayes, President of the United States. This could never become worthless paper. This was land. His gaze rose to the window out across the terrain he owned and farther. It was home and food for those you loved, and no one could ever take it from you.

Phil folded the document and looked at the wicker cradle which was new and not homemade, touched it, set it swinging. Softly aloud he said: "Electra." Abruptly he took up his breech-loader shotgun, stuffed a handful of yellow shells into his pocket and strode out. Step by step he had to feel the precise boundaries of his possessions.

When Andy came a day later to take him for initiation into the Grange, Phil was still out in the growing dusk with his ax, chopping holes through the crusted sod under the snow to plant the walnuts brought from the East for eating.

"I'd begun to think my petition had been blackballed," Phil said in the dugout while hurrying his dressing after being told of his acceptance.

Andy laughed, rubbing his palms in enthusiasm as his father habitually did. "They always allow four weeks for investigation. With all the education you've got you'll probably be our Lecturer." It was not the first time he had emphasized Phil's formal learning, and again Phil looked at him, wondering at such keen interest in affairs by one so young.

"You'll get to meet all the lodge members tonight," Andy went on. "Arch Palmer is to report on a new railroad we're trying to get for Plainsboro."

"You have to watch any deals with corporations," Phil said.

"That's why we picked Palmer. He's big and stubborn as a bull with

a voice like a foghorn, but he's a smart schemer. Even beats the schoolmasters in ciphering and debates."

In the sleigh Andy kept to a road trail of half-filled runner marks until they had picked up his hunting friend, John Freeman—a tall stooped bachelor ten years older than Phil. Phil had liked him for the strong, slow hand grip at their first introduction.

Once out of Freeman's yard Andy headed across country. It had snowed lightly again the day before, a clean level layer; and the low cutter glided with only slight sound. The fields were bright, and Andy let out the mares. They tossed and champed as they ran, and snow kicked up powdery by their churning hoofs sifted back over the men. It covered to gray the dark horsehair robe. It stung in pinpoint vigor against their faces, and Phil thought of Electra on their rides with her cheeks sharpened by mountain air. Only this was not like the shut-in silence of the woods. The night was wide. Bells and more bells came across distance and from some directions mixed young voices singing. To the north someone played harmonica accompaniment for a group.

"That Oscar Karns is sure good with a mouth-harp," Freeman said. "Sounds like there'll be a big crowd."

"And maybe some hell raising with Oscar on hand," Andy said. "Were you at the schoolhouse for church meeting that night he and I and Doug Palmer gave the good brethern so much to talk about?"

"No, I usually don't go if it's about church."

"Well, Doug and Joel had made some wild grape wine and hid it in the barn so old Arch wouldn't know. It was smooth as sirup." Andy described long pulls at the jug handed back and forth in the darkness until emptied. "I didn't notice much effect until I went inside to the stove and got good and warm. Then the room began to swim round and round. I motioned toward the door to Doug and Oscar and we tried to slip out, but the damned floor went up and down with my feet. They never met where I expected them to. I must have taken steps a yard high!"

"I'll bet old Ezra Karns gave Oscar hell when he got him home," Freeman said.

"Yeah, and the preacher preached temperance the next two Sundays!"

At the township corner the panes in the sod schoolhouse shone yellow across the play-yard from the coal oil lanterns burning inside. Phil entered with his companions at one end through a small, dim anteroom hung with coats into the brighter light of a dozen lanterns. Momentarily he stared. Facing him from the other end was a teacher's desk with a worn map of the world above and a blackboard of painted cardboard set into the wall behind. The low, narrow room was long, devised to shelter

crowds of church, elections and general community gatherings. The benches had been made in two heights to serve as seats and desks, but for the evening the taller had been grouped to the rear for better vision. Those were already filling and the men, rising to give seats to women and girls, stood along the side walls where more coats and mufflers hung from pegs and were piled on the deep window ledges. Diffident boys in their early teens packed the rear about the doorway, tumultuous with scuffling and banter. Andy looked their way half longingly in passing them by.

Heads lifted and turned with Phil as he walked the length of the center aisle—past the round iron stove, its heavy basebowl red hot—past young mothers holding sleeping babes that brought sharp reminder of Electra and his own expected child. Andy found a vacant spot for him on a forward side bench and left with Freeman to join Grange officers. Seated, Phil gazed about more thoroughly.

The arrangement of official lodge chairs at the front of the room struck him at once as familiar of his own work in Freemasonry in the East and made him wonder that not one of the many with whom he had shaken hands in Kansas had returned the grip of that Fraternity. Yet, some Mason had had a hand in organizing the Grange.

Presently, Phil was asked to retire to the anteroom. The Gatekeeper proved to be John Freeman. He locked the door, slid the key underneath it, and with a half-grin placed his finger gravely to his lips for silence. From inside came stir of movements and low utterances of ritualistic procedures. Then there came a single, sharp knock. Freeman answered it with three spaced raps, the key rasped in the lock, and Phil was reconducted by the arm inside. Heavy, black curtains now covered the windows. The teacher's desk had been transformed by a white drape into an altar on which lay an open Bible with a tiny spade and hoe beside it, handles crossed. Nearby stood a staffed flag.

Phil was led for Grange instructions from one to another of several stationed officers wearing sashes. One of them was Andy, seated solemnly erect in the chair of Assistant Steward. In conclusion little, bald-headed, bewhiskered Master Ezra Karns presented him with the tiny spade. "I now pronounce you Laborer amongst us." Karns's little pointed goatee wobbled fiercely up and down with his chin in speaking. "The tool is the symbol of planting. By it you are exhorted to plant well afield, and to choose with care your seeds of thought. As the Good Book wisely saith: As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

Chaplain Addison advanced to the open Bible on the altar and asked Phil to kneel in prayer. At the end men, women, and children stood at sturdy attention with right hands raised to the flag and recited the pledge

of allegiance with a fervor so charged with prophetic energy that prickles ran up Phil's spine.

The lodge was declared at ease while the officers in turn gravely congratulated him. Andy was last, and the pleasure in his gaze as he manfully held out his hand almost made Phil blush. The Grange was then called back in session for business.

While Secretary Henri Loubet, a blinking, black-eyed Frenchman, read minutes and Dean York gave his Treasurer's report, Phil watched the refreshment committee pour cans of oysters and gallons of milk into the hugest kettle he had ever seen. One of the women, with the firm, straight height of a young man, hoisted it to the flat top of the heating stove. She added a hunk of butter, then salt and pepper, tasting the mixture at intervals—and Phil, after bachelor meals in his dugout, unconsciously licked his lips.

Karns announced Brother Archibald Palmer would report on a second railroad for Plainsboro. Phil remembered Andy's description as a raw-boned giant with long sideburns and heavy graying hair strode to the Lecturer's station. His low forehead with creases and deeply buried gray eyes, repelled Phil with their quality of domineering strength.

Palmer's coarse bass voice began explanation of his petition to the Louisville and Denver Line which was fighting the Missouri Pacific. "I told them of our poor freight schedule and how the farmers were organized to support any company giving good service, and they hustled Superintendent Sweeney right out to see me. I knowed them fellers have to smell profits, so I trotted out my facts and figures on tonnage."

A mouth-watering whiff of steam turned Phil to the kettle. The tall, handsome woman was slowly and attentively stirring. How long did oysters need to cook, and how long would Palmer keep on? He hitched restlessly.

"Sweeney can't get a land grant for a spur line into town. It's against regulations on overlapping territories."

Those last words caught Phil's attention, and he looked back as Archibald held up a triumphant finger.

"We found the way around that—organize our own company. Our track will hook up with the L & D at West Bend. They'll build and operate it but call it the W. & P. Sweeney brought the legal papers all drawn up. We'll be stockholders getting dividends." There was a general murmur of approval.

Phil saw Dean York raise his hand and waited expectantly, but his uncle only asked: "What's this going to cost *us*, Arch?"

"I talked Sweeney into figuring it down to twenty thousand. That's

forty percent of the stock at five dollars a share. He's promised to start construction as soon as we've subscribed it."

Dean pondered and nodded. "I guess most of us can scrape up a hundred or so. We've sure got to get our crops shipped."

Arch nodded. "In looking to the future we can have our own grain elevator too, and a warehouse store to cut out the middleman. But right now, the thing is to get the track in ahead of next summer's harvest."

In listening amazed that no one raised the apparent questions, Phil forgot the oyster soup. He sat bent forward a little, looking up from under his black eyebrows at Archibald and pinching at the thin line of his mustache—thinking of the swindles he had seen. When all enthusiastic discussion was finished, he put up his hand to Master Karns.

"Brother Garwood."

"I would like some aspects of the railroad agreement clarified." Phil saw Andy's gaze swing to him. "From my experience with corporations if a spur line into Plainsboro looked like a profitable venture, the L & D would build it without investment from us. In fact I don't believe they would affiliate with any little twenty or thirty mile concern."

"I just told that Sweeney said they had to, to get a land grant," Palmer interposed impatiently. "He ought to know the in's and out's of railroading."

"Nevertheless, the information he gave you is not accurate." Phil spoke a trifle sharply from annoyance at Palmer's tone and paused, conscious of a lifting and turning of heads in his direction. He went on speaking distinctly for everyone. "To secure a government grant, Sweeney must present evidence in Washington of sufficient freight and passenger traffic to justify a second line. Such evidence is exactly the same for an established company as for any new one."

"You meanin' to say I got took in?"

"Not necessarily, Mr. Palmer."

Archibald's voice rumbled. "What do you mean then?"

Phil glanced about the room, not at Andy and the few seriously listening but at many amused faces that made him uncomfortably aware of the contrast between his eastern English and the local idiom. The woman at the oyster kettle had stopped stirring to look from him to Palmer and back with an incredible stare. He continued, avoiding accent and trying to address all. "Sweeney may have good reasons for his methods. There's a difference between the letter of the law and its application. The Missouri Pacific has powerful lobbyists in Congress who might block competition from the L & D; whereas a citizen's cooperative line would have a better chance."

"That's exactly what I said about knowing in's and out's."

"All right, but let us make sure of intentions." Phil saw his issues threatening to deteriorate into a personality clash with Palmer and pointed up his next question. "Who gets the sixty percent of stock?"

"Anybody who wants to buy it."

"Including the L & D?"

"We'll still have our railroad," someone from the audience cut in.

"Their railroad," Phil corrected him.

"It's gittin' freight cars, not who owns them that matters out here, Mister."

Phil looked for the speaker, irked by the sally with its inference to himself as a sophisticated outsider. People were grinning at Palmer's eldest son, Joel, egged on by heavy-faced, snickering Oscar Karns. Unconsciously, Phil stood up. "I'm not trying to cause argument but to show what might happen if you wake up to find a controlling stock interest in the hands of L & D executives. They'll decide whether to build a cheap, rickety track or a good one, and whether you get a train a day or one a year. They can vote the cost of their sixty percent of stock and your dividends to themselves in salaries, then sell the land granted and dissolve the company! I'm not saying all this will happen but it could. When you deal with corporations you need to pin things down."

Phil seated himself embarrassed by his heat, but in glancing about he now saw silent, startled faces with pursed lips. Andy and Uncle Dean gazed at him admiringly, and he encountered in Master Karns's sharp little eyes a look of penetrating respect.

Karns spoke first. "What would you say was a good way to pin this thing down?"

"I would request a written contract from the L & D guaranteeing a five-year option on twenty percent more stock at par value."

"That sounds sensible."

John Freeman raised his long arm. "To me too. It's only asking to control our own company, and if they won't let us there must danged sure be something wrong." There was concerted nodding.

"Would somebody put it in the form of a motion?"

Henri Loubet, blinking and looking at Karns for cue, rose and complied. "Second the motion," said Andy promptly.

"I reckon Brother Arch will be glad to take care of this for us," Karns said, looking narrowly at Palmer.

"I'll do whatever the Grange says." Palmer looked about the crowd as hands rose on the vote, his gaze coldly missing Phil.

In the bustle after adjournment complete strangers to Phil introduced

themselves: "You sure know big business deals, Garwood!" The round Dutch face of Bruno Haeckel became a big, ruddy smile as he approached. "Is goot you join our Lodge. Sharp eyes mit us ve need." Phil blushed but other Grangers nodded, slapped his shoulders and put him early in line to the oyster kettle.

When the large woman ladled soup into his bowl, Phil encountered her mild, brown eyes earnestly upon him. Despite her size she was yet but a girl, possessed of an enormous wealth of ruddy hair. Phil smiled to her, thanking her graciously, and quickly she dropped her gaze. Seated again with steam rising fragrant from his bowl, he wanted to smile at everyone. Chatter and gusts of laughter and crunch of breaking crackers made the room snug and close. Forgotten was the wide, raw country outside with frequent winter winds that hurried to no place.

Chapter 3

Phil discovered he had scarcely been introduced to wind until March. Then came the southwesters. Not just by hours but in successive days the gale rushed across the open country. It melted the snow, flooding prairie lagoons and deserted buffalo wallows until only the great hillside drifts, shrunk and crusted black now, remained to keep the streams trickling. The tall, brown grass fully exposed bent horizontal before the force of it, and from neighboring fields corn shucks torn loose from their stalks were borne hundreds of feet into the sky where they sailed along like small gulls.

The wind chapped his face and cracked his hands to bleeding, but rapidly it lost much of its cruel coldness. Real gulls came with their thin, plaintive cries that echoed his loneliness, and long, wavy flocks of honking geese until Phil's hunter's eyes wearied of marking their endless migration. Ducks crowded ponds and water-holes. Then one day the trickling streams had disappeared into their beds; the frost had left the soil.

Again neighbors gathered in, this time with teams and breaking plows. In a day his fireguard was turned and the plot for his timber acreage left shining black and ready.

Anonymity of life in the city made Phil's gratitude too deep. He embarrassed these helpers as much as himself trying to thank them. "I can't pay you back without horses."

"Shucks, our teams were growin' lazy, and you sure can't have animals till you've stacked winter hay. Come a visitin' any time. There's always table room for another plate of such as we have."

"They don't know how much they have in themselves to be appreciated," Phil had said to his uncle, and felt rather than heard a catch in his own voice.

"It's a way of getting newcomers acquainted and settled down, and a lot of folks feel beholden to you for saving their pocketbooks on that railroad deal."

Phil thought back to the vote of thanks from the Grange after the L & D had refused to relinquish a controlling interest, and he felt ashamed of his vanity of that moment. "The lodge owes me nothing for that."

"Folks'll think they do till they figure they've paid you back. After that you'll need to give a sharp eye to your corners in dealings, Brother Granger or not." Dean had looked narrowly at Phil as if to emphasize need of caution. "It's coming out now that Arch Palmer was to get fifty stock shares for organizing the company."

"I would have bet anything he was sincere!" said Phil.

"Oh, he wanted a good freight line as much as any of us, but if he could line his pocket getting it, that was just business. He and Ez Karns are tricky as they come, and Hank Loubet and Bill Addison will both bear special watching. I'd trust John Freeman and Dutch Haeckel anywhere any time, but they're about the only ones. When there's sickness or accident though, there isn't any of them won't pitch in and do all they can."

In the lengthening and increasingly milder days that went by while Phil awaited the important news of his wife, the building site of their future was buried deeper and deeper inside row upon row of cottonwood slips and seedling elms. He was on his knees often for the planting, and found unanticipated satisfaction in tamping with bare hands the warm top soil about live root tissue. Only a few inches deeper the earth was still spread with cold. Once while kneeling he spontaneously sat back on his heels with hands dropped inactively beside his thighs, while he looked far into the rich blue sky. For a moment life and dreaming seemed to merge for him, and he felt within himself a universal language of no words. He was not sure whether he was giving thanks or being thanked; but when the strange interval had passed, he knew that in it he had been the closest he had ever come to praying as a grown man.

Andy came that week with team and stone boat to begin hauling rocks for a foundation. As they were laid and mortared, Phil and his young cousin would sit down at noons to Aunt Emma's filled basket of buttered cornbread and meat slices with a jar of home-canned fruit or two slabs of pie.

"It's going to be awfully shady in here when the trees are grown," Andy said one day.

"That should make it cool, shouldn't it?" Phil asked.

Andy laughed. "Kansas isn't cool anywhere in the summer." They were resting against the rocks in full noon sunshine with dinner basket empty between them. "It'll be pretty though," Andy added.

Phil looked up from the pipe he was filling and liked the way Andy was half smiling over the last thought. "Do you want some tobacco?" he asked the boy.

Andy shook his head, grinned and received a grin. "I want it extra nice," Phil said. "This country seems so barren and heartless to me that I've had to imagine beauty into it. I want to bring a little of the East out here." He stopped speaking and packed his pipe extra long. "I wish the trees could be grown when Electra comes."

Andy became shy from a wishfulness of his own. "I know some pretty spots," he said hesitantly. "I could show them to you so you could take her."

"I'd like that very much," Phil told him.

They sat longer than usual that day for Phil to finish smoking before Andy unpegged the horses and they went back to work.

Those noon-hour intervals gave Phil bits of talk and character to write of to Electra, such as the first time Andy spoke unabashed of his own hopes and ambitions. "I want to help in our Government. This is the only country in the world where a common man can become governor or senator or even President if he never stops wanting and working to bring good things to the people. I wish I had your education to help me do it."

"I'll have Electra bring you my books on politics and history when she comes," Phil promised him. "I can help you study them if need be."

That night in his daily letter Phil had listed the volumes for Electra. "Andy is so eager and advanced for his years in most ways," he wrote, "and yet so sure he has missed everything important by not having traveled or lived in a city and studied farther than grade school. I haven't found the way yet to make him see that he is actually beyond many who have been in a university. If he didn't look up to me, maybe I'd know how to tell him. Andy wants to go into politics already! This life and country out here matures people early, and our children will have a lot of practical advantages when we send them East to college."

The greater portions of Phil's letters, however, were on a house that Electra would love, hidden in an immense grove through which the accursed wind could not blow. He heard the birds. Trees! Beloved too by Electra he saw a woodlot of them from his walnuts and acorns, stretching

down the ravine as a timbered creek where squirrels would scamper. He walked miles for handfuls of lilac, apple and cherry sprouts, although fruit trees and shrubs did not count on government timber acreage, and when an orchard was filled he began extending a fence-row along the boundary of his farm. There were spireas and wild roses still to be planted when capricious March reversed the proverbial order of weather and went out like a lion.

That day which began sultry warm, the ducks, that had dwindled in numbers, suddenly re-appeared by thousands in the sky in bewildered wheeling flight. Late in the afternoon a pall of smoke-like clouds came swiftly moving out of the northern horizon, and the blizzard was under-way with fine wind-driven snow that sifted under the dugout door until Phil stuffed an old shirt along the crack. By near nightfall it was whistling along so thick that it was blinding; and watching from one of his two small windows, he felt almost frighteningly alone in the gray, swirling twilight.

For two days it lasted, and Phil spent a part of each writing a long, long letter to Electra, again mapping their homestead. He stirred from the snugness of his dugout only after the storm had abated. The clouds were still scudding murky though broken, and the newly awakened plains had been returned to a tundra. Something in this wrath of the elements aroused his blood, and he faced north into the wind though it cut his eyeballs, bringing tears.

"You won't last long this time of year," he cried in spirit of accepted challenge. "The April Fool joke is on you!"

He was digging his fuel pile from under its great, white drift when he heard a youthful halloo, and Andy came riding down the slope.

"Still there or buried?"

"Still on top," Phil echoed gaily back. "How in hell could anybody leave!"

"We wondered if you were all right." His cousin slipped from his horse, tethered the reins.

"You shouldn't have come through weather like this!" Phil led the way into the dugout.

"There was mail, but no more till the railroad tracks are cleared." Andy fumbled inside his coat. "You got two letters." He hesitated, feeling under restraint before one his senior. "I've maybe brought bad news—"

Phil had turned eagerly. Sharply startled, his face remained toward his cousin, his gaze fixing on one envelope bordered in black. Once he with-

drew his hand in his reach for it; then he took both letters and walked to the window's light.

Andy, watching Phil's face as he read, saw the color leave and the letter slip and float to the floor.

"She's dead." He stood perfectly motionless as a man bullet-pierced cleanly will sometimes stand in the moment before he falls. "Electra is dead."

Andy made as if to start toward him but halted. Support did not seem needed.

Phil's lips twitched, mumbled: "I can't believe—" Mute again he tore open the second letter. It told of his baby daughter and was dated one day earlier, but both had arrived together.

In that moment of staring at the brief page he forgot the first read. "We've got a girl! I must go to them." He stepped to the door and kept jerking at it until it came open, crying: "I'll go now—right away."

Andy looked after him in doubt, then followed. "It's too cold to go out bareheaded."

Phil seemed not to hear but waded out through the snow without direction. His cousin caught up with him and took his arm. "If she is already gone, there's nothing you can do. Besides the trains won't be running for days."

Phil stopped, gazing blankly. He understood, and at length repeated, "Nothing I can do. That's right." He turned back, went inside and sat down. In the chair, he slumped forward.

The boy in Andy York was helpless before so much suffering in an older man. In gazing upon it he felt himself an intruder, yet, fascinated, he could not turn away. Great, tense tremors coursed up Phil's back and across his shoulders until the silence became a living thing stricken in pain unbearable to Andy. "Phil," he said to break it.

At the spoken sound Phil twisted his face upward, a glaze of wildness in his eyes. "God damn everything!" he shouted.

Andy chilled before the soul-searching curse leveled by a grown man upon the Power who gave and took life. Frightened and dejected he stood and looked away all about the room and then finally back at Phil, who had put his head down into his hands.

Evening would soon be at hand, and at length Andy went outside, stabled his mare and returned with a huge, stacked armload of stove wood. Phil was still sitting as he had been. Coat and overboots removed, Andy searched out food from the shelves and took down some pans. His clatter with them aroused Phil. "What are you doing?"

"Getting us some grub. I'll stay here tonight."

Phil shook his head. "No."

Andy hesitated. "I'll hustle home and send Dad if you'd rather."

"I don't want anyone."

Andy ceased his preparations and stood in uncertainty beside the table looking at his cousin.

"I want to be by myself, tonight, tomorrow, and the next days too." Phil uttered the words clearly and thin-lipped.

Andy drew a long breath. "All right." He replaced the cooking utensils and took all the time he could re-dressing into his heavy clothing, glancing repeatedly at Phil. He sat upright now relaxed, head tilted back and eyes closed like a sick man convalescing. I guess he'll be all right, thought Andy, taking a last look about. There's plenty to eat and I've brought in fuel. He knows best about wanting to be alone. Before he left, Andy picked up the black-bordered letter still on the floor and placed it folded on the mantel shelf.

Yet the boy rode away disturbed in mind and conscience; and a mile off he halted, turning in his seat with a hand on the rear of the saddle to look at the smoke from the dugout chimney before descending a slope which would cut off the view. He thought of how he and Phil had built together the foundation for Phil's dream house and of moments when little parts of that dream had seemed to Andy to become his own. It had seemed too fanciful to mention to Phil the magic in wishing by which he had set an Eastern brook with green banks to flowing through the grove for Electra to sit by, and seen Phil smiling a grown man's happy smile as he stood beside her there. Suddenly what had hurt Phil brought a lump into Andy's throat in a bewildering wave of pain, because by instinct Andy belonged to man, and to whatever hugeness all of man is. For the first time the shock of death's meaning pierced Andy, and with that came remembrance of his cousin's wild dash outside into the snow. Promptly he swung the mare about and started back, and the nearer he got the harder he urged her. I'll say Queen went lame, Andy planned; then he'll have to let me stay.

He dismounted before the dug-in stable and led the mare to a stall. When at the house his rapping was not answered, he entered and found the fire burning low, the dugout empty. The death letter he had placed on the mantel was gone. Andy called loudly, went outside and raised his voice to its limits. He returned to build up the fire, closed the door tightly behind him as he came out. Then he rebridled Queen and swung into the saddle. Sure of himself as to immediate action, he rode in a wide circle about the dugout until he found the trail.

Phil was more than a half mile from home and wandering steadily,

first seen in the early dusk as a dark spot moving on the white plain. He showed no surprise when the other came up along side and spoke to him, nor any sign of identifying him with his earlier visit. He wore a cap pulled crooked over his head, but he was without coat and his bare hands were clinched and puffed.

"I am going to meet my wife," he stated; "we have a baby. They say she is dead, but it's a lie. She wouldn't leave me. She's coming out here." He halted and with face so white that Andy feared it to be frostbitten, looked up at his cousin. "Isn't she?" A gust of wind picked up a swirl of surface snow and swept it like white dust about his knees and the hocks of the mare. Carefully, Andy explained all over again that the trains were snow-bound.

He got Phil back to the dugout and close to the stove and rubbed his hands back to warmth. Alarmed as to his course alone with such a problem, the boy had a change of mind. "You come home with me."

Phil held out his arms in childlike submission for the sleeves of wampus and coat put around him. Andy buttoned him up warm. It was only when he tried to put Phil into the saddle that he seemed to recover. Phil stood and ran a gentle hand along the neck and down the shoulder of the little animal. "She's too light to carry double. You get on and let me walk for a while again. Please, I'd rather."

Darkness gathered as they went. Light streaks of clear sky appeared in the northwest—herald of a bright day for the morrow. The wind, dry and subsiding, left a cold which seemed to burn.

After a while Phil's stride lost its shuffle, and the aching pain which had crept again into his now gloved finger tips melted away as his arms began to swing freely. "It's a good thing for me you came back," he said. "What made you do it?"

Andy remembered in confusion the now useless excuse about his mount going lame. "I forgot my mittens."

Phil looked up at him and almost smiled. His hand reached and tightly covered his cousin's free one on the pommel.

They waded drifts and rode by turns. From afar coyotes yowled, and their voices came clearly as though near. In the poor light the landscape seemed confused and limitless, but Andy led with no apprehensions. There were irregularities recognizable to him, and he knew that surer even than his human brain was the homing instinct of the mare.

Part II Dugout to Farmhouse

Chapter 4

It had taken two weeks to clear railroad tracks after the blizzard, and by then Electra's funeral was over. Her parents' letter on it, when it came through, had left Phil feeling drained and painfully empty of desire to meet anyone back there. Before he did return two Kansas summers had come and drifted past with hot winds and spasmodic thundershowers that pounded the earth. Through them and the intervening winter Dad and Mother Feldtmann had written regularly and enclosed occasional pictures of the baby that began as a roll of blankets with a face deep inside one end. In succession the pictures changed to a child held and then standing alone, but the face was always a button nose and wide, unsmiling eyes which failed to convey her reality. They were pictures Phil looked at and laid on the shelf.

Phil had hired out to Andy's brother, Jim York, for the harvest season and went with his cousin to view the grain the day it was pronounced ready. Surrounded by corn on two sides and far-stretching prairie meadows on the others, the wheat square looked small. The men walked a few steps into it. About their hips the wind stirred the bearded heads in which yellow was beginning to supplant green. The surface motion reminded Phil of water, and looking upon the running swirls and eddies and wakes gave him a faintly heady sensation pleasantly unlike seasickness.

Jim had picked a head and extracted a few fat kernels which he pinched under his thumb nail for firmness. "Stiff dough. They'll fill solid from the straw now in the bundle." Satisfaction was evident in his face and voice. "I'll bet you've never seen taller wheat!"

Phil put out a spread hand into the straw as Jim was doing and raised it, letting the beards tickle as the long heads slipped through between his fingers, but felt none of his cousin's pride in a fine crop.

"We could get rich growing it," Jim continued, "if we only had some way to cut enough of it ahead of shattering."

They drove Jim's Marsh harvester to the field next morning, and Phil's

partner in the tying job was John Freeman. That first day Phil disqualified all criticisms he had heard of Democrat John as lazy for breaking only a garden patch on his homestead and living from his Civil War pension supplemented as needed by wages. In the driver's seat Jim kept the four horses stepping along by aid of a long whip, and although Phil hurried with all his might, he could not begin to handle half the straw which came tumbling down from the elevator. Freeman had to bind much more than his share to keep it cleared away. By noon Phil was exhausted almost to nausea and scarcely ate while Jim and John twice filled and emptied their plates.

Back on the harvester a short hour later with the sun at its highest and hottest Phil's arms grew numb. And all afternoon while he fumbled and tangled sheaves, Freeman uncomplainingly tied at silent top speed to compensate. When at last dusk compelled them to halt, Phil's legs were so weak that his body sagged against his restraining waist strap, all that kept him from falling off the platform. His eyes and throat were burning from red rust spores off the grain, and his skin everywhere felt itchy raw from heat rash under the sweat caked dust. He managed to step down and stood swaying in the stubble while Freeman and Jim unhitched the teams. When they were ready for the ride to the house, Phil had to be helped into the wagon, and he turned in his humiliation directly to John. "I think I had better quit and let Jim get a good hand before you kill yourself doing your work and mine too."

"Quit!" Freeman cried. "You're going to be one of the best binders in the business." He slapped Phil's shoulder. "Isn't he, Jim?"

"Never saw a beginner do better."

Pride drove a wry smile to Phil's face for this unearned praise which he knew came from a sympathetic wish to help him.

"There's a knack to it is all," John insisted.

Phil was too miserably fatigued to remonstrate, but after he had bathed with his companions in the wooden, moss-rimmed stock tank and drawn on fresh overalls and shirt, his legs ceased to tremble as the trio walked through cooling air of evening to the lamp-lighted dining room; and at Mary York's cleanly spread table he ate of the fried ham and baked potatoes as he had never before eaten in his life. His sleep that night was a blank of unconsciousness from which Freeman aroused him at dawn only by jovially yanking him completely out of bed and onto the floor.

Phil stood up, stretched gingerly and groaned, grinning back at the amusement in John's face, and dressed in his work clothes now stiff with dried brine of yesterday's sweat and scratchy with wheat beards. In the field and once more working on the harvester platform, muscles

loosened and soreness wore off; and after a while he began catching a little of the rhythm with which Freeman swept aside bulky armfuls of the straw pouring down upon the table, twisting the bind and dropping the bundle in a single, continuous motion. It took Phil yet another day of practice before he felt he was doing his share, and a week to realize that his light, wiry strength was truthfully better suited to the job of binding than Freeman's lanky, six-foot height. And near the close of the cutting season when Jim went home from his last field to help Hendricks finish and Jeremy challenged a race, Phil nodded with Freeman and Jim. Whips cracked out over the horses above rattle of gears as they bounced along, fighting the surge of straw until sweat ran down their legs. That following Sunday morning as Phil stood shirtless on Jim's porch before the mirror shaving, he noticed swells of new muscles across his shoulders, and before he realized it he flexed his biceps. Afterwards he had looked sheepishly at his reflection, tanned but with teeth now stained by the tobacco always chewed and never smoked in vicinity of tinder-dry straw, and a feeling of compunction came over him for the physical gratification of the preceding moment.

After the cutting and shocking came the stacking of the wheat and then plowing to ready the fields again for spring seeding. The endless cycles of toil for small profits became apparent early to Phil. Yet in the abundant yields he saw promise that justified the adamant confidence of these people in their land. He saw them wealthy someday, simply by hanging on with hands alone, but their future no longer beckoned to him.

In time Phil became accustomed to women slaving over hot cookstoves and avoided his own dugout and cooking for their platters of fried chicken, their cottage cheese, their pies and crusty brown loaves. But he could not reconcile himself entirely to wives helping also in the fields and milking in smelly cowsheds, or to children pressed into labor—clubbing leaves from standing stalks of sugar cane, wrestling sheaves too heavy for them.

In September Mike Kelly came with his horsepower rig for the community threshing run. John Freeman had quit work to camp the autumn out on the river, hunting ducks and fishing; and Phil climbed his first wheat stack, pitchfork in hand, with big, heavy-faced, shifty-eyed Oscar Karns for a partner. Oscar turned a thumb down toward the separator, and his first speech was aimed at the squat, greasy machine. "I hope that son-of-a-bitch breaks down. Mike'll work us till our ass gut hangs out if it don't." He stared when Phil remained coldly silent, then turned, shrugged and winked at Douglas and Joel Palmer, who had shouted agreements from on top the stack opposite across the feeder. Doug winked back.

All morning the three vied in loud vulgarities of speech for Phil's benefit while he ignored them. That afternoon a broken shaft caused an hour's delay; and when Phil stretched out apart in the shade with a law handbook from his jacket pocket, Oscar took note to grimace to Joel and Doug who smirked.

The threshing crew slept in the field with the machine, rolled up in blankets against a chill in the night air which spoke of frosts. Phil never knew who planted the bull snake in his bedroll, Karns or the Palmer boys. Sight of the snake when he spread open his blankets startled without actually frightening him, and he got some satisfaction from the incredulity of his watchers as he gently picked up the sleek animal and with it coiling and gliding about in his hands, carried it aside. He had a feeling in the moment of his return that he could win acceptance with a display of humor for the prank, but none of the three seemed worthy of overture. That night, lying on his back on a wheat bundle pillow with crickets rustling and stirring in the strawpile and the stars dim in haze above, Phil felt more alone than by himself in his dugout. He thought of quiet John Freeman, missed and envied him, alone too but contented in a tent set in willows on the river bank. Phil remained alone until near the end of the threshing run when Andy replaced Oscar, fired by Kelly for getting drunk one night and pouring machine oil into the mouth of the separator tender for snoring. Andy laughed when told until Phil added grimly: "If young Karns had done that to me, I would have taken a monkey wrench to him."

At that speech Andy looked at him searchingly. "Oscar was a good kid till he got his girl into trouble and Old Ezra wouldn't let him marry her," he said. "Ez thought an orphan like Irene Barker wasn't good enough."

In the freedom of late fall Phil built blinds for prairie chickens with Andy along the hilltop ridge of Dean York's cane field. On its eastward slope were cane shocks with solid crests of sleek, black-amber heads to which flocks came of mornings to feed. Down the other side pumpkins lay among rows of corn shocks which ended in a single strip of green on the brown countryside, Andy's test plot of Turkey winter wheat. For Andy, Phil made a show of interest in it, and his cousin took him to it. It made a lush, ankle-deep carpet in which Andy knelt and almost caressingly parted the growth to check the stooling. "When I sent for the seed they told me I could pasture it all winter without damage!" Andy said. "But I'm afraid to try that."

Daily after the sun had risen and the last birds had gone, they walked

home past the corner watermelon patch. Frost had blackened the vines but had not damaged the ripe fruits which lay revealed—long, green and thoroughly chilled. They always paused to kick one open and to squat beside it shotguns across laps while they filled up on dripping, red hunks of crisp heart. Andy took him twice to the river for a few days on ducks with John Freeman. They gave Phil the best shots, praising him when he hit. He recognized their consideration was for more than his shooting ability and felt perfunctorily grateful.

By spring Phil had grown calm inside, and his mind had begun to reshape the future. He hired out again for the harvest. No longer with desire for a house, he let his dugout suffice for occasional days spent on his claim and converted his homestead to pre-emption with money once set aside for buildings and tools. As soon as sufficient rise in values came, he intended to sell out and return East to finish his law degree. "This country is no home for me now," he insisted to Dean York.

Then one day in his mail there came a photograph of a little girl with one stocking slipping down, seated back in a chair much too big for her and turning the pages of a picture book. "Little Electra says quite a few words, two months ahead of her mother," the letter said.

He went to the window and looked for several seconds at the small face. He should go back and see her? It would look better to folks who knew. He stared from the picture out into the autumn landscape, trying again to thrust away the illusion that Electra was waiting there. "Maybe after I've seen her grave," he muttered.

Phil told himself the trip was for appearances. Dad and Mother Feldtmann had asked to keep and raise the baby and he intended to agree. She's better off with them, he reasonably decided.

But on the evening of arrival when he stood over the crib drawn close to their four-poster and gazed down upon the yellow curls and pale-pink sleeping face, elfish and the image of his wife, his brain-made plan fell apart. Tears blurred his lashes and dropped upon the bright, small quilt. He brushed his sight clear, took a long look at the same face in silver frame on the wall above, and slipped away to the living room.

There near shelves of leather-bound volumes he and Electra had read together beside the fireplace, seated with graying-bearded Dad Feldtmann before the flames rising in and out among short oak logs, Phil made himself ask the question that had tormented him for two years. "How—how much do you think her worry over my losses in the panic was to blame?"

"I don't know if it was that at all," Frenssen said. "She had trouble bearing her child. Her strength didn't rally afterwards. She had a cold

and got to coughing next day and a hemorrhage started. She was just too weak, gone before we could get the doctor again." His blue eyes blinked back moisture, and they both looked steadily into the fire.

There came the smell of hickory smoked ham frying in the kitchen. Prince, the big collie, got up from his rug and sniffed the air. He looked long at Phil and as if at last recognizing him came over and pressed his head on top of his knee.

"How do you like your new country?" Frenssen asked.

"It's not the kind of life I was used to, all field work. It's big, no trees, and people live far apart. There's a future for a family when the land settles up, and I didn't mind thought of waiting as long as she was coming. I don't want to live out my life there now."

"A man's lonely anywhere by himself," Frenssen said.

"That's right," said Phil. He could not bring himself to describe a dug-out and how a man got to talking to himself aloud, not as a home for their grandchild. He knew he should tell them at once he would take her, but at the moment he could not do that either.

Phil continued to postpone it through succeeding days while the little girl's first doubts of him faded and they grew closer and closer, until she clamored to be carried astride his neck and taken riding behind Prince in the red wagon her Uncle Otto Feldtmann had bought her. That wagon and other toys from Otto gave Phil twinges of guilt for his own neglect. He sensed growing uneasiness in Mother Feldtmann's pleasure of watching him play with Electra. Yet he still did not speak. Near the end of his stay when he was packing books and sorting those on politics for Andy, she brought up the question herself.

"You are going to let us keep her?"

Phil shook his head. "I can't do it, Mom, not now. I've been wanting to tell you."

"She seems just like our own and always will if you let us have her. I'll take good care of her."

"I know you would do that, but she is mine—all the family I have and all I have left of Electra, too. I didn't realize that until she saw me the first time as a total stranger."

"But she is still so little, and she needs mothering so." Mother Feldtmann's lips trembled and her eyes filled.

Her son-in-law placed his arm about her sloping shoulders. "I'd sooner do anything almost than take her away from you. I never, never meant to when I came, but now I have to have her with me." He looked across into the bearded face of Frenssen. "I can't stay now. My property is

there, what I have, tied up. I've thought it all over and over. Aunt Emma can help take care of her. My daughter is going to have the best with me that I can give her, until we can both come back together."

Chapter 5

Electra's company brought Phil moments of tender amazement at himself that in his first sight of her asleep in her little bed he had known truly that she was his and belonged with him. Not because she was sired by him and was his wife's child, but because she was actually another part of himself which, until in her presence, he had never suspected existed.

Often as he held her through the trip back to Kansas, her fist curled on his breast, he did not lay her down when an empty seat was available. For while he swayed with the train with her sleeping in his arms, his thoughts were of the life they would have together. He would build a playhouse in the young orchard for the warm spring months. She would walk with him through the timberclaim and flower bushes with her hand holding his finger. And when he looked down at the spun gold of her hair and her button nose already perceptibly changing toward prominence he felt that now he could hold for always the rest of her mother whose presence had been painfully receding.

Aunt Emma came with Dean to meet them at the station. The trust with which Electra went at once from his arms to hers and Emma's face possessively tender as she wrapped and cuddled the child gave Phil a stab of jealousy. She did not give her back until she had had a cupful of warm milk upon reaching home. At the supper table she put the high chair next to her own, and she dressed Electra at bedtime and placed her in the crib beside the cot made up for Phil in the kitchen. The question in her face was too plain to him even before he overheard her say almost indignantly to Uncle Dean: "How can he possibly manage for her?"

Phil lay long that night with hands beneath his head, listening to Electra's soft breathing. When he made sure she was well tucked in before turning on his side, he had also made up his mind to leave Andy's books and depart to his dugout next morning. He had to insist on going and when he would not be deterred, Dean lent him a cow "so the baby will have milk."

At home with Electra he covered with cornsilk for real hair the rag dog Emma had sent along. Electra called it "baby" like her dolls but cuddled it oftenest because it tickled her face; and after Phil saw that, whenever he picked her up and kissed her, he tickled her cheeks with his

mustache until she twisted away squealing only to offer her face again and again for "no tickle."

Her picture books became almost a nuisance. Every evening as he sat down she was there with them, pushing them onto his lap and climbing up with her plea of: "Read me." Her solemn attention to the stories upon which she dropped off to sleep, and her memory of them so astounded him that he made mistakes for the pleasure of having her correct him. She takes to books just like me and her mother, he thought proudly, and I'm going to see that she gets an education.

Phil got his first shock of fear for her one bright and mild November afternoon. He had left the dugout open for sunlight and airing, and had looked up from his studying to find Electra gone, her toys scattered on the floor. He rushed to the doorway but halted the call rising to his lips. She was a hundred yards up the trail made by visiting wagons, dragging "baby" along by a string on his tail, in setting bravely forth to explore the world. He watched until she reached the top of the slope and stopped to stare out beyond the confines which could be felt between dugout and stable. To left and right gently stirring the brown grass stood higher than her red toboggan cap. Of a sudden she wheeled and fled back as fast as her short legs would go screaming, "Daddy! Daddy!" He ran to meet her and squatted for her to rush into his arms. While she clung to his neck and he patted away her fright, he felt relieved that she had shown this fear of wandering off—at the same time vowing never again to let her out of his sight.

He did not mention the incident to Aunt Emma on her visits to wash, mend and bake "Ginderbread mans." And she did not speak her disapproval for his lonely custody of his child until the first snow when she caught them at work together out in the slush finishing a snow man. Electra was excited over the results, but her shoes and mittens were soaked and her body shivering. Emma snatched her up and headed for the dugout. "Don't you know she'll catch her death out here!"

Phil followed inside and saw when Emma jerked off Electra's mittens how red the little fingers were. "I didn't—never noticed—"

Emma gave him a look with her usually mild eyes flashing. She started stripping Electra as fast as her hands would work. "Get me some dry things. And build up the fire. It's cold in here, too."

Phil hastened guiltily to obey. Goose pimples rose over Electra's naked skin and her body shook while being dressed again.

"She was having such a good time out there," Phil said.

Emma lifted Electra clothed to her lap and pressed her against her warm bosom. "You were having the good time!" She began to rock in-

dignantly, not looking at Phil, and he did not try to speak because of the anger he felt mixed with his humiliation. After all, she's my daughter, not hers, he thought.

When the loaded stove had begun to roar and its heat became intense he crossed over and partly closed the draft. While he leaned against the mantel in silence, Emma turned to him.

"Let me take her home and keep her."

The request did not surprise Phil, but came as one he felt to have been inevitable. Yet before he could answer, Electra had slid to the floor and run to his side. She clung to his leg, looking back at Emma fearfully with her big, serious blue eyes. Phil caught her and tossed her up to the log ceiling, then kissed her over and over until the tickle of his mustache made her writhe with glee. After he sat down with her he saw that Emma's face had grown forgiving. "You had no business bringing her here," she said, still crossly. "But now that you've made her love you so much, I guess it would be a shame to move her."

Phil promised to be more careful of Electra before Emma left, but the grounds for her concern did not reach him seriously until Electra awoke late in the evening fretful and coughing. Phil was up instantly to warm milk for her. He rocked her back into restless sleep and with no thought of rest for himself sat on the edge of the bed beside her, ready with a reassuring hand each time she tossed.

Through the long night Emma's accusations were with him and Grandmother Feldtmann's trembly lips and tear-filled eyes as she spoke of the need for a woman's care. "We wanted her to grow up with her real mother as nearly as she can," she had said in sending with him the silver framed picture of Electra they had kept hung close above the baby's crib. It did not seem to serve its purpose in a Kansas dugout, not even to Phil. He looked steadily at it so near on the wall beside the bed and ached with emptiness; for it renewed the memory of Frenssen Feldtmann drawing him aside in the last minutes at Weichsel station. "Before you go. She had something to say to you as she was dying. She—knew she was going—kept her clear mind right to the last."

He had waited while the old man prepared himself sternly for a new start.

"She said to tell you that when you had waited a respectable time she wanted you to marry again and fill out your life with someone else, and have a home for her baby."

"But I loved *her*! I could never forget that."

"The ways of the Lord are strange to us all, Phillip. She thought it best that you try." Frenssen had taken his hand and pressed it tightly. "And Son, I think she was right."

Phil still felt the same hunger he had at the moment of his own outburst, but, in gazing now at the picture, Electra's eyes seemed to accuse him. He had promised in taking their child to give her the best, and he had not done so. He had neglected her welfare out of selfishness in his own loneliness.

New implications in his predicament alone with a sick child came when he had to slip out at daylight to chores, and he listened often from chicken house and stable doorway for sounds from the dugout.

Electra aroused as Phil cooked breakfast. He carried her on his arm while he finished, his alarm increased by how hot her skin had grown. On his lap at the table she strangled and broke out coughing with the first bite of oatmeal she tried to swallow. Phil bent her quickly forward and patted her back until she had caught her breath and begun sobbing. While he comforted her, the bewildering blow of her mother's death came back and the full and frightening realization left with him of how suddenly death could strike. When Electra laid her head against his breast quiet and exhausted, all appetite for his own food was gone; and looking down at her he could think of nothing but their isolation. Abruptly he rose and moved his chair to the window. For an hour Phil sat beside it holding on to Electra tightly, watching the slope beyond his land boundaries without turning his head for fear of missing Jeremy Hendricks when he drove his cattle to cornstalk pasture. When he saw him, Phil snatched up a blanket, wrapped Electra warmly and ran with her in his arms a quarter mile to within shouting distance to ask Jeremy to send for the doctor and Emma York.

Mrs. Hendricks came with her husband on his way to town. She moved with heavy steps about the dugout, heating water and placing cloth packs smelling of camphor on Electra's chest. "It will loosen her cough," she said. Electra clung to Phil when Mrs. Hendricks offered to hold her, and by the time Aunt Emma arrived near noon to take her and put her to bed, Phil's arms were numb. He filled his pipe for the first time since morning and sat with it beside the stove hearth. He wished that Andy, who had brought his mother, could have stayed so there would be someone to talk to. Everytime he glanced toward the two women his relief from their presence became the more mixed with an unpleasant sense of exclusion by the manner in which they had taken over, and he began to feel that he had unduly alarmed himself. Help had been easier and quicker than expected, and Dr. MacGregor was on the way. And then all at once he saw also again the day-long, swirling twilight of the March blizzard.

Phil had never met the stocky Scotch doctor who came until he opened the door for him as he stepped down from his buggy. They shook hands

on the threshold; and when his older eyes met Phil's, Phil felt an understanding between them that was mutual rather than professional like a firm, half smile. MacGregor greeted the women by name, and Mrs. Hendricks began giving Electra's symptoms while he was still removing overcoat and cap. She followed to the stove describing her treatment while he thoroughly warmed his hands. "Camphor in steam is what I always give all my children for colds," she finished.

Electra began a spell of coughing. MacGregor listened to it end in breathless, whimpering sobs. He flexed his fingers and folded back his white shirt cuffs. He looked for a moment at Emma York, bending over the bed comforting Electra, but he chose Phil. "I think the baby will be less afraid of me if you help."

Emma moved aside for them. Phil kissed Electra gently and held her raised while MacGregor loosened the bow on the neck of her nightgown and slipped it below her chest. He watched, stroking her forehead, while MacGregor listened through his stethoscope and thumped; and Electra, motionless, looked up at the physician with her big eyes feverishly bright and less frightened than bewildered. She was submissive in everything, not even protesting when he looked into her throat and pressing down her tongue gagged her.

"One would almost believe she was trusting us to help her," MacGregor said to Phil.

Hovering in the background Aunt Emma heard him also. "Poor little thing," she said.

Their words brought to Phil a sudden sensation of deep, hot smarting behind his eyes. It did not leave until MacGregor tucked the covers about her and straightening up gave her a smile and patted her hair. "There you are, Honey, all done."

Phil followed him to the table where he opened his black satchel and looked at its rows of phials. Selecting one he measured out several white powders from it, enfolding each in paper. "You can sweeten these for her and give one every six hours to help her rest. Have her drink lots of water and continue the heat applications—in this case without the camphor." He smiled faintly to Phil in uttering the last phrases. When Phil went outside with MacGregor to his buggy, he said he would stop again the next day.

He made a third call before Electra was playing and Aunt Emma was willing to leave her. She still sniffled when Phil went into Plainsboro the next week for groceries, so he took her to the doctor's office.

MacGregor listened to her chest for several minutes, back and forth from one side to the other. "Has she always been rather delicate?"

"No, I don't believe you could say so," Phil said. "She lived with her grandparents in up-state New York until this fall, and I don't think they ever had a doctor for her."

"I see. Well, she doesn't seem to be especially strong of lungs." He put Electra's arms back through the sleeves of her dress and handed her to Phil to be buttoned up. MacGregor had been quick and deft, but he was slow in putting away his instruments and over the page of notes taken from a file drawer. "I would say we headed off pneumonia for her by a pretty narrow margin." He met the startled gaze Phil gave him and seemed to be studying the father-daughter combination of them, and Phil felt his arms instinctively tighten about Electra.

"I can tell you what is best for your child," MacGregor said.

Phil gazed down into Electra's upturned face. "I guess I shouldn't try to keep her with me," he said at length, his voice low.

"It isn't with you but where you live. A dugout is always damp, and she isn't acclimated as native children."

"My Aunt Emma York has offered to take her," Phil said, "but I—" He halted. He could not criticize the natural mother in Emma which had taken over with Electra at every opportunity and seemed certain to supplant his love. Yet if it were best for her—He turned to MacGregor and saw in the physician's face his thoughts being read.

"I know just the right place for her. Irene Barker has a snug house and a little boy who would be a good playmate. I don't believe that you would mind if people talk."

Phil shook his head. He had heard the gossip which linked *Miss* Barker and her child with Oscar Karns, but he was not thinking of that as he sat and stared at the floor. He was seeing his dugout empty again and trying to take as much unhappy relief as he could from MacGregor's suggestion. "No, I won't care about any talk."

"They can't say a great deal if I arrange it for you," MacGregor assured him. "She's had nurses' aid training, and I've taken her with me on cases for patients who didn't object." He paused while trace of a wry smile settled upon his face. "Let's you and me say *Mrs.* Barker and get the good habit of it started over the neighborhood."

Chapter 6

After the first days and nights in his dugout alone again, Phil found less desolation than expected. Electra was within visiting distance, and one day she would be old enough to return. He bought a horse to go to see her often. His horse also made it possible to attend Grange meetings regu-

larly and easier to join Andy and John Freeman. Sometimes the three argued the night away over politics and the books Andy was studying.

Under Irene Barker's care Electra's sallow willowyness changed to more weight and color, then into more height; and taller also in Phil's registered timber plots rose the cottonwood and elm slips with downward searching roots to anchor them into firm young trees. With the growth of both, his land became an important investment again—for Electra's future as well as his own. In the month of Electra's fourth birthday he passed the half way point to a patent of ownership on his timberclaim. In autumn that same year Phil purchased a second horse and a plow to begin farming for himself.

Walking behind the first team he had ever owned, he watched the share slice cleanly through matted grass roots and the brown, frost-nipped blue-stem fold neatly under black, slick earth turning up. Resting against plow handles to look back over the finished field, he wondered at his tinge of remorse. With dips and swells of enormous clods of sod, glazed and shining, it resembled a small, choppy sea.

Phil shook off the clinging feeling of desecration at destruction of virgin meadow. Just for being broken, every acre is worth a dollar more, he told himself. If I get a crop, maybe I'll buy another eighty—five hundred and eighty that would be altogether. Why not? More profit for himself and Electra when he sold out, and all else was invested in land. The Panic had passed bottom—real recovery signs now from the East with manufacturers advertising widely.

Sensing opportunity, Phil's old urge of stock market days stirred strongly. Now was the time to get in on the upswing. In the last years of a boom profits multiplied.

He was safe from starting a prairie fire in the middle of his plowing and took out his pipe instead of tobacco plug. Hard times began always in the East, years before the effects were felt fully out West, and prosperity traveled the same slow route. It might be several years arriving unless the Granges hastened it—but it was coming. Yes, it would take more years. Recovery had not yet been full in the East on his trip for Electra. Not yet the same exciting Wall Street and Exchange on his visit as before the big crash—1873, the lost brokerage house of Thaddeus Anderson where he had read law—the death mask of the old man's face, one of unremembered suicides. "Ten years give a lot of perspective," Phil muttered aloud.

Beside his plow in the peace of the field Phillip Garwood thrilled until the skin crawled on the nape of his neck. For in that thrill there was appreciation for a spectacle and the satisfaction of understanding however belated.

"If only I had known then what I do now!" he cried aloud. He shifted weight abruptly with his words and the movement together with the sound broke the spell. Coldly he compared the scene with the one of his visit last year. From the gallery he had looked down on the same room. Cigar smoke rose to meet light pouring in through the skylight and hung high above him in a stagnant layer, softened and diffused. The stir and bustle of voices penetrating upward was without surges. Yet it was once more acutely a vigorous, living sound and the brokers, many again, busy seeking out best prices for clients.

Phil's hands trembled slightly as he knocked out his neglected pipe. He threw the plow over on its side for dragging and started the team for the yard where he put them in the stable. A thunder shower was forming in the west, and he came back with a bar of tallow to grease the share and moldboard against rusting. He milked his cow and hurried toward the dug-out with eggs from his few dozen hens. Milk and butter and eggs, corn-bread and sorghum. Collectively they had kept many alive in the region. Dean York's words of the cold first morning in Kansas came back to Phil: "You can't beat butter and cream."

Inside, he packed kindling into the stove and pulled the pot of stew over one lid hole to warm against the blaze as the fire picked up. He set a skillet in the second hole and stretched two slices of salt pork side across the black bottom. When the meat was half fried he broke two eggs into the sizzling grease. Bread molded quickly in the mustiness of the dug-out, and he had taken to crackers of which there was a tin box still on the table from the noon meal. Plenty of butter helped relieve their dryness, and Phil churned weekly during the cooler season when butter did not become rancid.

While he laid out his plate with knife, fork and spoon, the city streets came back to him as seen after the crash while searching futilely for employment—streets filled with wanderers. The New Year's bread riots were already historic—bakery doors smashed in and policemen clubbing heads. No conditions that bad any longer, thank God. Andy was right. Such should never have been allowed. No gold cornering by Fisk, no Jay Cooke and Company speculating with stockholders' money.

Phil ate, listening to rain that began falling, melting the clods of sod in his field. Once he went to the door and looked out at the clouds which were spreading. If this continued through the night, the soil bed would be settled, ready for harrowing after a few sunny days. The moisture would soak through into subsoil and be held for next season.

Dishes washed and lamp lighted, Phil brought out his sacks of seed corn and sat down to them. He settled his pipestem under his mustache

worn now as a full bar and began nubbing deformed ends of ears into a pan for his chickens before shelling the remainder. The first handful of true yellow kernels he spread and stirred in his palm under scrutiny. They were deeper and more slender than native varieties—Wisconsin corn. Phil smiled at them, recalling Dean York's indulgent expression as he had sat chewing tobacco, listening to Andy argue the advantages northern seed should have against early drouths.

Finally Dean had cleared his throat. "If they have a strain that really matures in ninety days, it's almost sure to get through tasseling down here ahead of our hot winds," he said. "But order your seed on the cob if you want to try some to be sure it comes off good ears, and order early so you'll know it *did* grow in ninety days."

Yes, it was hard to get ahead of old Dean's judgment.

Phil sat back to tamp his pipe and thought of the faster, new-style hand corn planters displayed in the Plainsboro hardware store. "With one of those and my ground ready plowed for spring, I can gain another week in earlier planting," he told himself aloud. "With rains for a yield I'll be good money ahead of hiring out to others and be my own boss besides." Pleased with the thought, he bent again to his shelling.

If Phil could have known ahead of investment in team and implements the discovery he was to make three months later, he would have decided against farming forever.

He was shucking corn for Jeremy Hendricks late in December when he noticed stunted stalks bordering a barley stubble. The day was a mild, bright one such as had characterized most of that fall, and he paused with cap pushed back to examine the affected stalks. In the warmth of afternoon sunlight, grayish specks crawled in and out the crevices at the base of dead leaf sheaths. Mashed between thumb and finger, the tiny insects gave off faintly of the odor of bedbugs. Phil shook several onto his handkerchief and carefully folded them inside the cloth for bottling and mailing to the Bureau of Agriculture in Washington. At the Plainsboro post office two weeks later he received from the office of Federal Commissioner of Entomology a manilla envelope bulky with newsprint on chinch bug control.

Phil read the material in Irene Barker's little living room and so far forgot Electra on his lap from fear rising through him that she slid off in favor of her rocking horse, new from Christmas.

"Look, Daddy, no hands," she called, holding them up free of reins while riding at a furious pace to young Hal Barker's pushes. "Look!"

"Yes, I see you," he said, barely nodding as he rose repacking the papers. He chucked Electra under the chin without kissing her. "You be a good girl, Honey; daddy has to go to the Grange tonight." He paused

only at the wash-house door to tell Mrs. Barker, busy over her tubs, that he was leaving.

Phil stopped to bottle new specimens enroute to the meeting and drew a reprimanding frown from Master Arch Palmer for tardy arrival.

Phil waited just inside the door while Andy, now lodge Lecturer, recited in clear, strong voice to Mike Kelly and wife in the candidates' chairs. When Palmer had formally pronounced them Husbandman and Matron and called the Grange into business session, Phil was first to raise his hand. "Worthy Master, I request the floor for a matter of vital importance."

"Brother Garwood may take the Worthy Lecturer's station," said Palmer.

Phil gave Andy the government pamphlets and bottled specimens to distribute and waited on the little platform until they were being passed along the rows of benches. Then he held up a phial. "You should read those papers and take a good look at these insects. They are chinch bugs!" He paused for effects, but there was not a flutter. "They are the most destructive insects to corn known!" he announced and waited again. Some members stirred and looked up but with curiosity instead of concern.

"I first saw them in Jeremy Hendricks's field and only today learned what they were. Everybody should inspect his farm in the morning so we can have a special meeting tomorrow night on eradication. It'll be a big job. Wherever they are, we'll have to burn cornstalks and fencerows and a strip along adjoining pastures. It'll take a lot of men to make sure no fires get away from us, and we should all cooperate; because if there aren't any bugs in a man's field now, they can spread from his neighbor's. We'll have to stop planting barley, too, for a few seasons. That's the worst spring crop for the bugs to lay eggs in."

"Wal, now wait a minute," Palmer interposed. "I been raising barley for ten years, best dry weather feed crop there is. If these bugs are bad as you tell, where've they been all the time that they should show up all at once now?"

"According to the entomologists, they were probably brought here recently in baled hay," said Phil, "or have got scattered along right-of-ways from straw used to pack freight cars."

Jeremy Hendricks rose with a sample bottle uncorked in his hand. "Well, your enty—ah—fellers may know what they're talking about, but these bugs look mighty small to me to do much damage."

"That's what I was thinking," Arch Palmer said. "It'd take a million to eat up one cornstalk."

"They don't eat it," Phil said. "They bleed it to death sucking juice."

They took several rows of corn alongside Jeremy's barley. I also saw on the way over tonight that they killed a strip for Ez Karns."

In the Overseer's chair, Karns's dried-up little body straightened as high as it could go. "There was nothing wrong with my barley last year that anybody has any call to want to burn off my farm! I threshed one of the heaviest yields I ever had."

"Chinch bugs don't damage the barley," Phil said. "They just hatch out in it and after it ripens leave for the cornfields."

"Well, I'd a sight rather have a whole field of barley than the three or four rows of my corn you *say* they killed!"

Henri Loubet, blinking excitedly and looking at Karns for approval, burst out loudly. "There's more to what Ez says. Barley is the surest hog feed crop there is, come a dry spring when corn fails." He turned to the Lecturer's platform, and Phil saw triumph in his black eyes. "You're not keeping hogs like some of us. You don't need to plant barley!"

Phil stiffened. "I did not come here tonight just for myself," he said directly to Loubet. "Barley *is* the worst crop for harboring chinch bugs. That is specifically stated in the government pamphlets and I don't like your insinuations!"

The Frenchman's voice immediately rose in pitch. "It's a fact just the same that you don't raise hogs!"

"This hasn't got a damned thing to do with hogs—"

"Now Brethern—now, now." Master Arch uplifted a finger in admonishment and won a general chuckle which reminded Phil of their personal clash over the railroad.

Dean and Jim York were grinning with the crowd, and even Andy's eyes left the pamphlet folded open in his hand for the entertainment of the exchange. I should be laughing with them, Phil thought, and while his judgment struggled against irritation the short bulk of Bruno Haeckel rose among the benches. He also held up a finger. "It gifs not good dot ve quarrel here."

Phil nodded to him. "That's right, Bruno."

The broad face flushed in earnest gratitude. "Ve burn veeds, stalks and snow blows off, melts not in the fields for vetness. You b'leef the bugs hurt worse than dot yet?"

"That's what the entomologists say," Phil told him. "They say chinch bugs will destroy whole fields of corn."

Haeckel stood a long moment in thoughtful understanding. Then slowly he shook his bushy, blond head. "I vant dot ve vait one year und see."

"I reckon the thing to do is vote on it," Palmer said smoothly, "if Brother Garwood would still like to put it to a motion."

"Yes, if no one else will," said Phil, loudly and distinctly. He brought Andy impulsively to his feet.

"Some of you like Bruno are holding up because you aren't sure, but it's here in black and white." He tapped with his finger the pages he had finished scanning. "This is a United States Government publication." Instinctively his hands, pamphlet and all, went out to them, and his words went urgently also. "This may mean your corn crop. Come on; let's all get behind it." Andy's palms motioned upward as if to raise them. "I move the members of this Grange cooperate in burning chinch bug winter quarters wherever the insects are." On front benches people leaned forward as if to comply, some turning their heads to see what others did; but because response faded out behind them, one then another, and then in twos and groups they settled back.

It seemed to Phil that he would have to second his own proposal, and his gaze searched the crowd so earnestly for support that he saw eyes avoid his in embarrassed half smiles. Then across the room Democrat John Freeman rose to his angular height. Married now and with a pretty wife and a son, John still held his prairie acres intact save for a garden. He shifted weight to one leg and leaned much as Phil had seen him do on the barrel of his shotgun while waiting for prairie chickens. "It's no skin off my nose what's done on the question 'cause I'm saving my land 'stead of growing corn." There was a general crowd chuckle at his reference to his own sloth in not plowing his homestead. "I don't know what a chinch bug looks like, but I read a sight." Freeman hesitated, turning his stained corduroy hunting cap round and round in his hands as if his obsession for books were an indictment. "Well, if these are the bugs I've read about, there's a time coming shortly when all you folks will wish you had voted yes tonight. I second Andy's motion."

"You have heard the move made and seconded," said Arch. "All in favor stand."

Dean York stood up from the Treasurer's chair. "If John says so too, I'll join in." Jim followed his father's lead.

Bruno Haeckel and several others looked toward them and shifted in uncertainty, but none rose.

Palmer counted. "Five, Worthy Secretary. Those opposed?"

This time only a few scattered members who chose not to commit themselves remained seated. "The motion has lost."

Phil disregarded a warning look from both Dean and Andy and tried to persist in defeat. Impatience close to anger came into his voice. "You had better read those pamphlets and reconsider. You can't wait to see or it will be too late."

"Wal now, I've never farmed out of a book or from a desk in Washington," Palmer said, and Phil's face turned pink at laughter which arose. "As Master I can only rule with the majority. 'Course we've no objections to you burning off your land if you see it that way."

"Hell, one of us alone wouldn't be a drop in the bucket, and you know it!" Phil said. "Very well, *brethern*, you have decided." He stepped from the platform and without looking at anyone collected his pamphlets. With their envelope under his arm he leaned against the rear sod wall of the room, hands in his pockets. The sense of estrangement among these people which he thought he had overcome came back and over him. He watched their impatience to be through with the closing ritual with a feeling of aversion.

Palmer's commanding stroke of the adjournment gavel brought blended noises of scraping feet and benches and released voices. The women began pouring tea. Up front people closed on the Kellys, joshing and congratulating them on full membership. "Now's the time to tell you all Brother Grangers get grain threshed at half price." The big machine owner laughed back at them. "Like hell! I joined for the chance to charge more! Gotta pay for my new rig."

Other folks pounced upon the food baskets being spread open.

"Hey, Joel, only one to a customer!" Oscar Karns bellowed at young Palmer, who with tincup balanced on top a sandwich in one hand was digging into a second basket.

"What's a man got two hands for?" Joel retorted.

The warmth and clatter of the room seemed to Phil to stir above him, until Andy stored his sash and staff of office and came with refreshments for them both. "I wish we could have convinced folks in time." Andy's voice sounded disappointed but not baffled.

Phil felt that Andy, a man now, standing stanchly at his side, had always been the link between himself and the plains and its inhabitants. "You nearly had them," Phil told him. "If a few nearest had stood all the way when you asked them to, almost everybody would have followed."

Then recollection of the crowd thoughtlessly wavering made the Grange and its avowed purposes suddenly futile to Phil. He chewed and sipped in silence until Andy with lowered voice said solemnly: "If you were right, a lot of folks are going to listen to you from now on."

"I don't know if they'll ever listen to anybody and think," Phil said shortly. "Are all Granges like this one?"

Andy laughed seriously. "Dad says farmers will always be hard to organize. Each has a piece of land for his own little kingdom, and they

have to argue a thing a while to maybe get together on it. We should have gone around the country first and made folks see."

"They could have wired the National Grange for information instead of passing me off as a fool," Phil said. "This could hold down the price of land for years."

Andy looked at him and away. "No use making discouragement. You've had enough in your life you couldn't help."

Phil went home stubbornly resolved not to mention the subject again. He held to silence even when one balmy afternoon in late April the air suddenly filled with large, gnat-like insects that disappeared after a day or so as abruptly as they had come. He kept watch on Jeremy's field of barley across the fence from his own corn, and after a June inspection as the first gold of ripening appeared, he saddled a horse and went to the Yorks'.

Andy and his father had their harvester out checking and oiling it under a shade tree. Dean tipped back his straw hat, and a wry grin came into the wrinkles about his mouth as Phil rode into the yard.

"We've been expecting you. Andy's been watching our wheat and barley the past week and this morning took me along. Your damn bugs are there."

Andy threw Phil a furtive wink. "By millions, aren't they, Dad?"

Dean wiped his hands of grease on a piece of burlap, took out his pocket knife and tobacco plug. He cut a chunk and picked off specks of dirt before putting it into his mouth. "If it ain't one dad gummed thing it's always been another. Years ago it was the grasshoppers."

"They haven't left for the cornfields yet, so we've still time to try a dust barrier," Phil said. "My agricultural books say that will stop a lot of them." While he described how to plow the furrows, Dean squatted against the trunk of a shade tree, spitting and listening.

"Maybe it's worth trying," he said. "Them college fellers ain't always wrong."

Phil settled himself but hesitated before turning his horse. "You can tell folks at the Grange tonight if you think they'll listen. I'm staying home."

At that Grange meeting Andy got laughed down. "I knew Garwood wouldn't stop worrying about his little bugs," Joel Palmer said, and next afternoon Arch went special to Phil's place to see if the story of plowing a barrier could be true. Unbelievably, Phil was out with team, dragging a stone in the furrows to keep the gray dust fine as flour. He drew up, resting back into the lines knotted about his waist, and astonished his

neighbor by sticking to past assertion that chinch bugs could and would ruin a whole crop.

"I warned you, and I knew for certain when they swarmed in April. You better take a look at your own corn right away. You've got the biggest and yellowest field of barley in the country."

"Well, even if you're right," Arch said, "suppose it rains and turns this dust into mud?"

"If that happens while they're still migrating, I'm beat."

Arch scratched his sideburns, reinforced by a new idea. "Anyway them pesky bugs got wings. They can fly over!"

"Have you noticed any flying lately?"

"No, but suppose they do?"

"Catch them and pull their wings off!" Phil shook his lines and started his team ahead. Over his shoulder to the man left standing open-mouthed behind he added, "Don't forget when they've killed your corn that we could have prevented it."

Unconvinced but disturbed Palmer did return past his corn where it adjoined his barley. Stalks all the way across the field had become literally covered with reddish, crawling specks, and the plants looked sapped and pale. "If them's the same critters he showed us last fall, they were black then," Arch muttered. He bent for closer inspection and saw that they were wingless. Palmer spent half an hour walking about uneasily studying conditions. At last under impetus of a brand new inspiration, he hurried to the house and returned with his family, several gallons of kerosene, and all the pails and whiskbrooms for sprinkling they could muster. Until dark they labored, and as an insecticide it proved very effective—killing insects and corn indiscriminately.

For Andy the blunder provided wry delight, and he came riding to describe it to Phil. "Arch don't know Oscar Karns told me. I'm going home past his place to ask what's the matter with his corn!"

"Somebody will knock hell out of you someday, Andy," Phil said.

Andy tightened his reins and nudged the pony's flank with his heel. "I'll tell you later what he says and how his face looked."

Chapter 7

Arrival of chinch bugs to attack corn brought wheat more and more into attention. With the second summer the reaping season had been stretched from four to six weeks. No amount of laboring, however, could harvest wheat on a wide acreage scale.

Word of an actual self-binder came to Phil from Jeremy Hendricks, who drew up his team on the road to shout the news across intervening meadow to the field where Phil was cultivating corn.

"Yes sirree! I come from seeing it with my own eyes. Arch Palmer's got it, and it cuts, binds and drops your bundles in bunches!" Jeremy spat and shook his head in excitement. "I never would have believed it. Folks talked about it for so long it seemed just like that there business of perpetual motion!"

Phil left off tending corn and hitched his team to the wagon to go see the binder in operation. He straddled the horses over the tongue and hooked the tugs, wondering how such important news could have taken him unawares and that Palmer, as cautious as he was, had been first to buy. Phil grinned to himself as he climbed up over the wheel. Probably the old skinflint withheld payment pending demonstration.

There had been newspaper talk of an invention, but hell, you might read anything in them. "Of course salesmen around the country wouldn't stop at my place," he muttered, "where they didn't see any wheat." No money to buy even a reaper, and a binder would be twice higher. But other folks—

As he rode jolting along on the hard spring seat with brassy blue sky stretching from horizon to horizon and the wind hot against his cheeks, he saw one harvester after another standing idle in the fields—their owners gone before him. Strange how new problems worked themselves out, and binders could be the solution to the chinch bugs. The answer to higher farm income seemed to be to grow more bushels. Unless too many more should oversupply the market?

The team slowed their trot to a walk unnoticed. On either side of the narrow road tawny bearded heads of Red Turkey wheat in uncut fields rustled and sighed with rasping sound above slow creaking of harness leather—beards in multitudes scraping on beards as waves and eddies flowed across the amber surfaces. The few pecks of seed brought by a colony of Mennonites in their long trek from the Russian Ukraine had spawned hundreds of acres in the heart of a new, vast continent—the first hard winter wheat to the United States. Rooted and stooled in a carpet by the end of October, it had proved additionally profitable as winter and early spring grazing for cattle as well as for record summer yields in grain. From sight and sound of the ripening crop surrounding him, Phil saw those hundreds of acres now to be multiplied into thousands upon thousands. It grew on almost any soil and thrived through drouths that would kill corn.

Phil recalled the one small patch of green in an autumn brown country-

side below the prairie chicken blinds on the ridge, the first field of Turkey wheat in the Plainsboro community. It seemed long ago already, that second fall of his life in Kansas, and Andy's experiment with seed ordered from the Harvey County settlement. Dean York, in shocking the new wheat, had cursed the prickly quality of the beards which stubbornly penetrated even denim cloth, but the test plot had threshed out ten additional bushels per acre of plump bronze berries so flinty hard they rang against the metal of the scoop shovel. Shipped to millers equipped with the special machinery required to grind it, it had sold at a premium; for the flour was a baking marvel. Maybe too much could not be grown; maybe the world would never have enough bread.

The Palmer homestead came into sight, and the population of the county seemed to be gathered there. The country road was so lined with teams tied to limestone fenceposts that Phil had to tie up at the far end of the field. He walked out across stubble ribboned with wheel tracks to standing grain and waited for the machine. Down the field it came with roar and clatter of cogwheels, kicking out bundles at regular intervals and raising a cloud of dust which nearly obliterated the crowd half surrounding it. On top rode Palmer, his body straight as an admiral's, beside the long, perpendicular whip that waved back and forth in its socket. At the corner he halted the four sorrels with a drawnout "whoa" and made a ceremonious descent, bustling about in style with oil can, inspecting shafts and bearings.

A newcomer raised for the millionth time the question of how many bundles it had failed to bind.

"Hain't missed nary a one, since we got it properly adjusted!"

For his astounding answer Arch was rewarded with the usual flood of acclamations.

The company agent had knelt in the dusty stubble to spread open his books and papers, center to a circle of squatting farmers whom Phil joined.

"The binder you see operating is the six-foot intermediate size. On this page we have a five-foot platform machine and over here the seven. You can choose to fit your needs. Every binder comes completely assembled to your farm, ready to cut wheat. One of our factory trained mechanics will be there for your trial field run in case any minor adjustments are necessary. You pay nothing for that service. It is the company's guarantee of satisfaction."

Phil loitered a couple of minutes listening, then walked back over to the machine.

"What do you think of it, Garwood?" Henri Loubet asked.

"It gets the job done, but the brass wire that ties the bundles looks dangerous to me if you let cattle run to your straw-pile."

Arch looked up, sensitive of any depreciation of his prize, especially from Phil. After the chinch bugs he had been elected Grange Lecturer, in which office Palmer was obliged to listen to him gracefully. "Nobody's cows is going to eat wire!" he said.

"I'd be afraid for my herd," Phil retorted. "The threshing machine is sure to chew off small pieces to puncture intestines—" He halted, feeling antagonism he had kindled in Arch spread through the immediate group at his dampening of optimism. For a moment he nibbled at a corner of his mustache, then turned away to look for Andy, who was not there. He stood apart after his brief search and called himself a fool. Why can't you get along with these people? You started to argue when you knew that if wire was the only fault with the binder it would be corrected. In gazing across fields and hollows it seemed suddenly to Phil that the land itself was the cause of all the strife. This earth that won't lie barren west from the Ohio. It makes the kids be born and inventions come to it. But you aren't in it, Phil Garwood. Inside his pockets his hands closed into fists.

Arch started the binder, and Phil walked with it a little way watching the mechanisms in action, but hearing through their noise the chatter of excited farmers with plans to turn entire farms into wheatland, and calculations of multiplied returns. If they were correct there would be a land boom with quicker profits from investment in acres than from sinking money into machinery. Should he mortgage to buy that adjoining eighty before it boomed? It would finish out the section and someone else might buy it if he waited.

Half way down the field, Phil stopped following the binder. Sounds of crowd and machine progressed on, pressing the harvest, while he turned back diagonally across the dusty, shimmering stubble for a drink at Palmer's meadow spring—drawn by the freedom and calm of spring-fed brooks so rare on the plains and a spot to think things out. For the void of his own non-participation he no longer condemned himself or the people left behind. They had made him remember the fervent moment so like a prayer when in tamping roots for his grove and Electra's he had gazed deep into the blue sky and breathed with the earth. He looked up again now, but the color seemed shallow and the slow wind out of the southwest came in heat waves off the straw turning gold. Then he thought of the moment just past when he had been making his own new plans because of the binder. I can't stop wanting bigger things and neither can

they, but our needs are different. The thought took none of the dejected sag from his shoulders. For the hour he wished only to sit and rest.

Phil reached the pasture fence and let himself slowly over it. The ravine beyond was thick in growth of wild plum bushes and tall, green sunflowers; and as he followed the path up the tiny stream, whistled notes of an ancient Irish melody reached his ears. He emerged cautiously from the vegetation. A young woman vigorously grown with thick, reddish braids sat splashing her bare feet to and fro at the lower side of the pool, her bonnet folded on the grass beside her mannish, cowhide shoes. Her mouth was puckered into comical contortions by efforts at music. Beyond, the stream welled out of the bank and came down in a miniature cascade. On all sides native bluestem waved high as her shoulders. The girl's first reaction to an intruder was a scrambling attempt to draw her skirt over her bare ankles.

Phil lifted his straw hat and held it at his waist. "I didn't mean to startle you. I came for a drink. I hope you don't mind."

"I—guess not." The tanned face turned slowly pink.

He advanced and knelt, lowering himself forward on his hands to place his mouth at the source. He drank slowly, giving time for her to recover composure before he rose. When standing again he wiped his mustache and addressed her smiling. "That's good, cold water. I'd give a great deal for a spot like this on my farm."

Her mild brown eyes stared at him without response, her expression an odd mixture of curiosity and shyness which seemed familiar.

"I might have used the dipper," he said of the hollowed gourd hanging from a plum twig, "but I've never forgotten the satisfaction of laying my face to a spring." Again he waited for her to speak. "You must be Miss Margaret Palmer. My name is Garwood; I live over west of the Yorks. I came to see your father's binder run."

"I know; Pa talks about—I mean I heard you at the Grange."

Phil chuckled mildly. "I've no doubt your father doesn't speak very well of me." The girl's face so reddened with embarrassment that he genuinely regretted his quip and once more paused considerably. He was smiling kindly when she looked up into the first full gaze to pass between them, and something behind her brown eyes reminded him of his own loneliness which had for the moment disappeared. "You mustn't mind what I say," he told her. "It doesn't amount to much."

"Oh, I don't mind. I think it's grand! Nobody else ever beats Pa!"

Despite himself, Phil chuckled from pleasant surprise that she could burst out so from such reticence. He remembered then that she was the girl who had cooked the oyster soup at his first Grange meeting and

watched him during his clash with Arch. Now he saw that she was not fat as recollection had it but raw-boned, rather like her father. Strange that he had never noticed her elsewhere.

"You told Pa about chinch bugs," she suddenly rattled on, "but he wouldn't believe. Then they ate all his corn." Her eyes sparkled, momentarily near laughter at memory of her father's consternation.

"I had heard he found a good spray for them."

The girl looked at him in the uncertainty of whether he had intended humor. "Did Pa tell you our spring was here?"

"No." Phil sat down for a pipeful of tobacco, and she eyed his action of tamping the bowl carefully full. "No one told me."

"How did you know?"

He twiddled the earth at his feet with a twig of bluestem, smiling inwardly at the naiveté of her speech. "Is that your flower garden up the draw?"

"Yes, but who— You have been here before!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, yes. I stop by sometimes."

"Oh—" She clapped her hand over her mouth and her eyes grew wide. "I didn't know. I thought it was my spring."

He saw that she suspected him of spying upon her. "You never were here," he said quickly.

Her laugh of relief sounded like a young girl's. "I get silly here sometimes," she said.

"You have a right to. It is your spring. I get lazy here myself and oversmoke my pipe, I'm afraid." He drew on it contentedly and smiled. One of the girl's feet, which had been hidden under her skirt since his arrival, reached out to tickle the surface of pooled water, and she stole a glance at him.

Phil pretended not to have noticed. He relaxed back with his knees drawn up inside his elbows and told her of finding the spring his first winter in Kansas. "I got lost out hunting on the prairie. You lived in a dugout then over there in that bank. There wasn't anybody home. I had no idea who lived here, but I was hungry; so I helped myself to whatever food I could find. As I think of it, some cornbread and a piece of sorghum cake."

"Oh! It was you who spoiled my cake!"

"Yours?"

"Yes. I remember too because it was a new recipe, the lightest ever, and I'd iced it all over white. We were saving it for company at Sunday dinner, and I was so proud! I cried my eyes out nearly at finding a big chunk cut out."

"I'll apologize now, but it is a little late. I'm not sorry though, for it gives us something in common. Sort of makes us old friends, don't you think?"

She looked at him doubtfully to see if he were making fun of her and without talking further began to pull on her heavy shoes.

Phil moved nearer and bent to the laces, and her foot shifted involuntarily as if for withdrawal but remained. He drew the lacing snug. "How does that feel?"

"Pretty good, I guess."

"A little too tight?"

"Oh, no, just fine!"

He saw then that her face was burning and he did not look up again until he had the last knot tied. He would have liked to detain her sitting a while longer, but she stood up hurriedly.

"I have to go back to shocking. I oughtn't to have played so long."

Phil rose with her. "Field work is too heavy for a woman under this hot sun."

"Oh, I don't mind. I could have taken the place of one of the boys cultivating corn and had an easier job, but I don't like to be bothered with a team. Pa says hard work never hurt anybody."

"But fancy needle-work and music— Wouldn't you like to do things of that kind?"

Her glance was troubled, but there was no reply.

They both paused in their leaving to look back at the cascading spring, and Phil realized he had almost reached out for the girl's hand. Once away from the path he walked by her side, amazed at her height and strength of frame, and trying not very successfully to make conversation. He knew now that this was Arch Palmer's oldest daughter, "Big Maggie" to neighbors. When they reached the wheatfield, he helped her set up a windrow of shocks toward the road and his team.

"Will you show me your flower garden sometime?" he asked as they finished.

"No-o—"

"Why not?"

"I guess it's not worth much. My brothers say you can't eat it."

"You shouldn't always listen to them. I'll make a talk on new kinds to grow at the next Grange meeting if you'll come and hear me."

"I don't get to go to the meetings except to cook—or most anywhere." She looked down at the ground miserably. "Pa thinks girls shouldn't belong to Granges."

For an uncomfortable moment Phil looked at the face she did not lift,

his feelings a mixture of compassion for her and irritation bordering on anger at Arch and his sons. Why could these people never see beyond cropping the land? Why did Big Maggie belittle her unconscious appreciation for springs and flowers? After the questions there came back also the emptiness of his own dugout awaiting him. "I'm sorry you can't come," he said kindly before he left her.

When Phil rattled past in his wagon a few minutes later the girl paused in her shocking. Her bonnet fell back, and he could see that her face, so recently cool and fresh from its wash at the spring, was already grimed with sweat and dust. He waved, but she gave no sign.

Chapter 8

Phil returned twice to the Palmers the following week to see if the binder still worked, but spent most of his hour each time talking to Maggie. A few days later he made his first call at the house.

Phil opened the screen door for himself when his knock was answered only by voice. Maggie had told her parents he was coming and Arch returned his cordial "Good evening, Mr. Palmer" civilly but did not put aside his paper. Joel and Douglas said hello from their checkers. Phil bowed to the younger daughter, Virginia, and Mrs. Palmer, who obligatorily set aside her knitting.

"Take a chair," she said. "I'll tell Margaret you're here."

"Thank you."

"You have a nice home, Mrs. Palmer," he said when she returned and sat down.

"Thank you." The clicking of her needles resumed at once.

Phil had spoken honest admiration of Palmer's new house. In silence of conversational failure he dawdled his hat between his knees, feeling more and more the sorry inferiority of his dugout. He was grateful that Maggie did not keep him waiting. She came downstairs in a crisply ironed dress with her thick braids wound, and Phil escaped the huge living room with her to the porch swing. There she sat at his side straight and tense. The crown of her hair brought her to a level above Phil's height. In the half light from the curtained window he saw her softly rounded bosom rapidly rising and falling. "You look very nice," he told her, and then felt sorry for her that she should drop her head. The foot she had put out to start the swing lagged down again. Phil turned impulsively nearer and lowered his voice. "Now don't act so. I meant that." His tone sounded so like parental scolding that he had to laugh at himself, and Maggie

looked at him with brightened face. He began shoving the swing vigorously for both of them, and she relaxed and rode with her feet held straight out.

"My, this is being lazy," she said.

"It's good for you," said Phil.

Maggie turned quickly at the words with an unanticipated intensity in her face that startled him. "People do have fun, don't they?"

"Why, of course." He spoke easily. "In fact I know of a party next Friday. Shall we go?" She smiled and nodded so happily that Phil felt gratified with himself. For a while he swung in quiet, comfortable companionship with her, released from lonely hours of study and brooding in his dugout.

They were chatting in low voices with an occasional creak of new impetus to the swing and the house not long quieted and darkened to a single lamp left burning in the kitchen when the clock struck. Entirely too promptly with the sound, Arch's voice boomed out. "Daughter, that was ten o'clock."

Maggie winced and furtively lowered her head.

Phil stopped speaking. After a moment he said, "I'd better go."

She was silent in assent, afraid to risk inviting him to finish his interrupted description of the Catskills, and he rose.

At the steps she whispered violently, "Pa oughtn't to be like that!"

"Sh-h-h." He put his finger to his lips against her vehemence and saw her look of unbelieving relief at the chuckle he could not forbear. "I sure got off to a bad start with your old man!" He took her hand and patted it. "Don't be troubled. There's that party next Friday. We can go places away from here."

Toward Arch, Phil maintained thenceforth a constant, carefully polite aloofness. While not pleased at any prospect of losing his best worker, Palmer could find nothing to object to outright. Maggie was twenty-three, an age considered verging on spinsterhood, and Phil could not be indicted on the prize deficiencies—laziness or poverty.

After corn shucking, Maggie was hired out to work for Mike Kelly, whose wife was ailing. There Phil could call any evening except Saturday, when Arch came for his daughter and her week's wages. Mike with a word of greeting discreetly left them to themselves.

On the first night Phil came they formed the habit of sitting in the kitchen to visit, because Maggie happened to be baking. He smelled loaves in the oven when she opened the door for him. Maggie was wearing a gingham house dress with an apron tied around her waist. Phil hung his coat and took a chair beside the table while she returned to the stove

to give a kettle of apple butter a thorough stirring. Even in the poor light of coal oil lamp the bare pine floor and wainscoting showed fresh scrubbing even into the cracks.

"This house was such a mess when I came yesterday, I hardly knew which way to turn first," she said. "I'd have set bread last night and had it baked, but there was no yeast until Mr. Kelly got some in town this morning. Mrs. Overbrook had been baking for him since Mrs. Kelly turned so poorly. Dr. MacGregor says she should eat raised bread."

"Isn't it a lot of trouble looking after her?"

"Oh, no. He does most of that. This is a nice place to work. Mike never says anything except when he jokes, and she doesn't try to give orders. She told me to go ahead just like I would at home." Maggie raised the long spoon and tapped it clean on the kettle rim before pushing the apple butter back to simmer. Then she brought out the bread board from the pantry, wiped it, and placed it at the back side of the table. It was the first time Phil had seen her in half sleeves. Up under the loose cloth above the elbows as she worked near him her arms were white as milk.

"It's a wonder you don't freckle," he told her and added purposely as her gaze dropped to her arms—"Now don't blush."

She did color then. "I wouldn't have, if you hadn't said not to," she said, laughing too, as he laughed at her. "You like to tease same as my brothers. Every summer they say this time I'll freckle sure, but I fool them and just turn brown."

Phil rose and followed to watch when she went to open the oven. Maggie folded a corner of her apron to catch one of the shallow pans and slide it out onto the door. She flipped the round loaf over on her other palm, also covered, and rapped the bottom crust quickly with her knuckles before dropping it back.

"That's the first time I ever saw anything thumped besides watermelons!" Phil told her. "Is it ripe?"

"Oh, I can tell when they're done. They sound kind of hollow."

"I had supper, but I'll bet I could eat again," he said.

Maggie laughed. "You'll have to wait a while till they're cool enough to slice." From the oven she carried the loaves to the table where she placed them in a double row on the bread board and spread a white tea towel over them. "There—all finished."

Phil drew their chairs close together. They sat down side by side with the lamp pulled near and looked at the flower catalog he had brought, she turning the pages with him.

Maggie bent forward to each colored picture. "I wish I could grow some of every kind."

"Well, of course they wouldn't all do well out here," Phil said. "I've run through a book or two on them, and I can tell you which. I never did make a talk on flowers at the Grange, because you couldn't come, and I didn't think anybody else would be interested."

After the catalog there was a game of dominoes and then the bread he was waiting for, still warm so that the yellow butter melted into the soft slices before he spread over a thick layer of apple butter. Maggie also set out a pitcher of milk, very cold from the kitchen window box. While they ate they talked about the taffy pull at Ross Overbrook's the next Wednesday night and of the school program and box-supper the following week on Friday; and then, surprisingly, Phil saw that it was late time to leave.

All that winter now with a beau, Maggie joined the crowd with a feeling of triumph, for the first time in her life unhumbled by presence of daintier women; and by spring she and Phil had been seen as a pair so often as to arouse gossip. Though no mention of marriage or spoken affection had passed between the two, folks shook their heads and shrugged and hastened to hope they would "get along."

"Maggie's a good girl, but it does seem odd. Him with all that book learning and her with almost none."

"Well, a bachelor's life on the farm is a dog's life, you know."

"Yes, and he needs somebody for mothering his young one."

For Phil, who usually walked the miles to Kelly's to visit Maggie, there was a strangeness in his nighttime wanderings home. With pipe a red glow before him he cut across pasture corners, and whether the prairie night was black or moonbathed he traveled always with a feeling of escape from that dimly lamp-lit kitchen that smelled of wood fire and the pantry. Yet whatever it was he eluded there, it became daily more unwilling to remain behind until one night he felt that in some wispy form it had pursued him across boundaries into his claim and did not turn back until he had shut the door of his dugout against it. Phil built up his fire and sat in the dark save for the red glare from hearth, trying hard to recall upstate New York woods with Electra in a white dress that the wind blew around her ankles, his hours of eager reading in the law office of Thaddeus Anderson. But persistently he saw Maggie, sewing a noticed missing button on his coat and chattering naturally now. "Land but I'm getting lazy with no fodder to pitch to the cows. Our old roan should have a calf soon. It's been my job to wean and bucket train them. Nobody else will let them suck their fingers learning to drink. I get sopped all over milk when they bump the bucket." He smiled in the dark at her laughter at herself, kindly yet regretfully that there was never a place for him to speak of prosecuting wrong in a courtroom.

Phil dozed restless after he lay down and awoke at his regular hour still tired. He turned his face into his pillow away from morning light from the window but was unable to go back to sleep. He ate breakfast with suspenders left hanging at his hips and sat long over his coffee. With his lethargy itself a hurt he decided to go into Plainsboro and see little Electra.

She and Hal Barker were drawing on their slates, and Electra excitedly showed him her cat that was mostly whiskers. "I can do better than Hal," she said. Phil lifted her and gave her a big kiss and winked at the boy who would not protest at her bragging. He settled her on his lap in the big chair. "Draw something else," he said. Instead she tried to slide off to the floor, and when he held her back she said, "Daddy, you're too bumpy." He let her down reluctantly, and she turned to him with those big, serious eyes with long lashes and brows that had already learned to make little furrows, her lips pursed and her yellow curls covering her shoulders. He took hold of her shoulders gently and looked long into her face.

"What's the matter, Daddy?"

When Phil could not answer she hugged him impulsively around the neck and put her silken hair against his face. He felt his eyes smarting and pressed back hard. "Daddy loves you!" he said softly, but the tears which had threatened did not come because of deeper pain from realization that she could not know the intensity from which he spoke. He raised his head, saw the stare of the fatherless boy, standing with slate forgotten in one hand, the fingers of the other rubbing his hair, and looked beyond him toward the sound of Irene Barker returning through the back door into the kitchen.

He stayed to play with both children a while, drawing for them the moon on the Hudson and telling Electra that she could go there to see it someday. He gave them the promise: "When it's warm you can both come visit me." And for Electra's mother he repeated silently another already made to himself that their daughter with her quick interest in books should have full education. A vow that carried unconscious acknowledgment that not she either could be with him always.

Phil left well ahead of evening, ever keeping his visits within limits of broad daylight to forestall ugly gossip. People had conceded that Electra was too young to understand, but he had been warned by MacGregor it was as far as their charity would go.

On into spring Phil continued to attend Maggie, never willing to ask himself why. She was unusually quiet as they walked home from an evening May basket party. The night air was mellow and fragrant.

"This is the last week I'll work for Kellys," she told him at the gate. "Mama's going to Michigan to visit Grandma, and Pa wants me home." Her voice rose high in pitch to a rebellious key that came near breaking. "It was my turn to go and Virginia's to stay, but my turn never comes. I have all the work; Virginia doesn't do a thing! I don't know if you'll come to see me anymore there. Pa is so cranky!"

"I'm coming whether he wants me to or not."

It was the first time Maggie had confided directly of her unhappy home lot. His response had been spoken like a vow, and for moments afterwards they stood detached at loss to say more—she on verge of grateful tears for his concern, and Phil with a sinking feeling that he had committed himself. He put out an arm about her splendid shoulders. Maggie looked frightened as she came to his embrace, her first, but she came, instinctively submissive to the masculine desire. Phil saw clean, bright tears in her eyes after their kiss.

"I'm so happy now," she whispered.

He drew her to him again, gently, and pressed her cheek to his shoulder, stroked the wonderfully heavy hair drawn back tightly above her forehead. "Tomorrow is your afternoon off. Can I see you?"

"Of course, Phillip." She stepped back from him and he did not try to prevent her. For a moment they stood facing each other, only their hands touching. "Good night," she said.

Next day Phil borrowed Andy's new Velie buggy for a drive to his farm. Maggie sat in the leather seat beside him solidly contented, answering questions, asking none. On either side of them the shiny black spokes of the wheels made flickering arcs in the sunlight.

Finally Phil announced bluntly: "I'll build this summer if you will keep the house for me." It was out, and he flushed at the crudeness of his own words, but Maggie only looked at him in queer surprise.

"I thought that was all settled after last night."

For an instant Phil felt repelled. It was settled, not just since last night and their kiss. Intuitively he had known it was settled for many days. In his yard beside the buggy he braced one of her hands forward for support while she gathered her skirts with the other as she stepped a foot to the toe-rest and sprang to the ground.

"Here we are," he said. "You've never been here, and I thought you'd like a say on planning the house. There's a full section of farm land."

Maggie looked about, drew a long breath. "So much! Why—that's more acres than Pa has!"

"You didn't know how much I had?"

"No, I didn't know."

"Well, most of it is still raw grass land, and the last eighty isn't paid for yet."

"We'll pay for it," she said.

Maggie sat at his side on the dugout steps, shoulder against his, to look at the drawings he spread across their knees.

"Shall we make our plans for next summer?" he asked. He saw still brighter pink come into the brown cheek nearest him and kissed it gently. "You have to say."

Her shoulder pressed a little tighter. "June."

Maggie saw only pencil lines in partitions and doorways he had become absorbed in tracing out the night before; and when she agreed without following him to only two rooms upstairs, Phil folded up his prints.

"They fill up with odds and ends anyway," he heard her say. "If you throw your junk away you always need it, and if you save it you can never find it. All I want is a kitchen with a sink and pantry."

"You will have it." He looked straight before him a moment and put the papers into his pocket. "There is another thing, my little girl."

"Yes?"

"There may be other children of your own." He turned to see the question leave Maggie's eyes and her face soften. "Electra must share in our property and always be treated just like the rest."

"She's a darling. I'll love her," Maggie promised faithfully.

"She won't be with us the first winter except maybe week-ends; so we'll be mostly to ourselves."

"That needn't be."

"I think so. I want us to have that much anyway, since we can't have a honeymoon, and I want her to have the advantages of a good start in the village school. I've already made arrangements with Mrs. Barker." Phil noticed Maggie's look of uncertainty and faced her at once squarely. "You aren't one of those who think— Why she works like a slave! She ought to be helped, not hounded!"

"I know it. I can hardly keep my mouth shut when Pa gets to talking. I keep wanting to say: 'What about Oscar Karns?' Everybody says it was him and Ezra got him out of it."

"I've heard that," Phil said, relieved. "It was before my time out here."

"Well, she was all by herself, a working girl. Oscar was a good looking boy, and he wasn't so wild and bad either until he went off to the mining camps afterwards. Ezra spoiled his life too. But people will think your little girl shouldn't stay on with her."

"It's none of their business," Phil said. "She's taken good care of Electra, and Hal has been like a brother."

They left the dugout porch to look for a building site. The shrubs Phil had planted and forgotten had drawn from the virgin soil rich strength for a ramshackle, vigorous growth—the more attractive in their untamed state. Below, the ravine widened into a woodlot of sturdy young oak and black walnut already above head high.

Phil gazed on the trees with new-found interest. "I sent back East for acorns. Folks here told me they wouldn't grow because they weren't native."

"Folks don't always know." Then Maggie seized his arm with a quick little cry. "There's the place! Over here." She pulled him after her, and her breath came fast. "I never saw any spot so pretty like this. It seems almost as if it were *made for a house!*"

A fierce, sharp pain tugged at the man's heart. He looked away speechless, his eyes hurting, until Maggie's uncomprehending first gaze fell upon the crumbling stone and mortar of a foundation. He heard the catch of her breath and felt her fingers drop from his wrist, knew that she had looked at him and then away quickly.

"I'm sorry, Phillip." All the bright excitement had gone from her voice.

Without trusting himself to answer or turn his face, he reached for her hand, brought it back, pressed it tightly under his arm. Then he turned with her away toward the team.

They were in the buggy and part way home before Maggie brought up the subject that Phil knew from the silence harassed her thoughts.

"You never told me about her. Was she beautiful?"

Phil shook his head a little, not in denial but from unwillingness to discuss it. Whenever she stole a glance at his face as they rode, his gaze was straight ahead on the backs of the trotting horses; but after a while there had come into the lean profile a profound gentleness.

"Maybe it's best this happened," he told her slowly, when they were again in Kelly's yard. "I might never have found courage to bring it up, and it's a thing to have done with. We'll build the house where you said; that's where it belongs. And I'll make it up to you someway. In the end everything will come out right if you believe in me."

By the next March the house had been built, kitchen with sink and pantry. Not included was a reading room of early years' planning, its walls shelved for books. Omitted also was a cement cellar promised to Maggie. Though planned as an arched cave, it had progressed no further than a dingy, earthen affair, with rock steps, his dugout deepened and re-modeled.

"It takes a lot more money to build than I figured," Phil said. "There's already a first mortgage for that last eighty, and we don't want to go too far in debt. I can put up the chicken house myself, but I'll have to keep carpenters for the barn."

Maggie nodded. "Pa said it was robbery the way they charged on our house, and somebody had to be there to keep them working."

"Yes, they're slow," Phil said, "but they're doing the job right. I'm seeing to that."

The barn went up faster since it called only for rough work. Through sound of hammer and saws its sparse, yellow pine skeleton of uprights, joists and rafters grew into a great red structure with rounded roof of upstate New York Dutch style—a building folks came for miles to admire. It stood in handy juncture to pasture corral, its mammoth hayloft ample storage for tons of forage. Phil meant to feed out cattle if he could grow the corn. Feed bins, stalls and stanchions were placed with an eye for convenience. Into the cow stable floor, sloped for drainage, went the bricks and mortar that might have been used for yard walks. Once started and responding to the inherent human urge to build, Phil could not have told why he was carried away in pains and expense.

The wedding date had been set for June 10th, and the nearer the day the stronger for Phil the sensation of being hurried along by factors beyond his will. He could not have reasoned out his marriage to Electra either, but in that case there had been no trepidation. That was right, he had known without reasoning, simply because it was right, and they had gone to meet the perfection of it with the same wonderful expectancy of birds to the mystery of mating. Now there went with him an apprehensive bewilderment of something missing.

Phil had asked Andy to be present at his marriage. He borrowed his cousin's buggy again for the wedding drive. Andy brought it over that morning ready polished with his best driving team curried, brushed, and reined high. He saddled Phil's mare for the remainder of his own trip and returned to the house just as Phil caught himself pausing before the mirror to make sure the flaw he felt was not in his dressing. He finished itemizing: tallow-shined boots—black, tight-legged Sunday suit—broad ribbon tie. The white line of scalp was exactly straight and exactly through the middle of his black hair, slicked and waved on either side of the parting; and his mouth more than ever showed its strong cut beneath the fresh barber trim of his straight brush mustache. He saw Andy's warm and admiring gaze in reflection as he came up behind. Phil turned and they met each other's eyes almost solemnly. Andy had a package under his arm and placed it on the table. "This is from all of us."

"Thanks," said Phil. "I'll wait and let Maggie open it." He glanced at the mantel clock and it read past time to go; yet he stood for the moment immobile staring at it. How slowly the hands turned—but they never stopped. He heard Andy's voice earnestly speaking the customary best wishes. "That's from all of us, too."

"I'm sure of it," said Phil. He picked up his hat and Andy walked with him outside to the buggy.

In the bride alone Phil read, when he arrived at the Palmers', the fulfillment elsewhere absent. The white of her satin gown with frills of full-gathered shoulders and sleeves had been forever of weddings; and he felt for a guilty second as she came across the wide living room to greet him that to her, perhaps, there was a deadly injustice. He made a move to warn her, but his throat had become suddenly dry and his tongue thick.

She was good to look upon with her smile of strong, even teeth and red highlights shining in her thick hair, heaped in a great, dark coil a-top her head. Her steps betrayed a strength and grace which even encumbrance of bustle skirts could not conceal.

"The best horse in the family leaving you," a neighbor had expressed it to her father.

Maggie's eyes were shyly bright as they rested on Phil. Her cheeks bloomed suddenly with something brighter than their natural healthiness, and the tiny shamrock locket of her mother's grandmother trembled against her throat.

Phil shivered. Was it wrong for him to take this woman feeling as he did? He had known for months that he would, because what was fated, he was helpless to oppose.

The Palmer clan, young and old, were ranged along the walls, something of hostility in their bearings. Phil shook hands all around and relaxed the tension. He spoke graciously to Arch, just as he had been careful to do that evening when he asked for the daughter's hand. After greetings, Arch went for his wife, who had hidden away in the kitchen. Phil heard the fresh outburst of Sophia Palmer's weeping at sight of her husband to offer consolation.

"Whatever will we do without her?" she moaned. "How will I ever be able to get along!"

"Hush, hush," Arch's voice commanded. "She isn't going far. It won't take but a little bit to send one of the boys for her when you have more than you can do."

Returning to the living room with her, he called the couple over to them and taking out his wallet placed a shining new double-eagle in the

palm of each. "It's the same as I aim to give all my children. Be good to her, for she's a good girl."

"Thank you," Phil said. "I will."

Maggie blushed deeper, drawing herself unconsciously erect. Phil felt strength almost masculine in the muscles of her arm as he helped her into the buggy. Such a foolish gesture! She needed no assistance.

They drove off to see Henri Loubet, Justice of the Peace, where Andy would stand with them to witness the ceremony. After that they must hurry to the new house to prepare for the evening shivaree.

Part III Less Grain and More Hell

Chapter 9

Phil tramped doggedly up and down corn rows behind team and cultivator, hands grasping the handles, head sunk forward, his gait heavy and plodding. Dust followed along in a dense, still cloud, filled his eyes and mouth and settled to cover his body in a smarting, itching layer.

Over and over, round and round the same mounting problem revolved unsolvable. Another corn failure this year and no money to buy wheat farming machinery. His cattle would have to be sold from grass at a loss as feeders. A mortgage hanging over him for his buildings, and in the East a new Panic to keep the loan company clamoring for payments. Maggie pregnant since spring. More family might tie him down here forever. As an orphan who had made his own living, Phil understood too fully the burden of a mite coming into the world unprepared for. And to what end—to grow up and perpetuate the story through another generation? Surely man was intended for a better lot than misery. There was something wrong with the system.

His blood was aroused by the unhappy premise which drummed ceaseless in his brain. He turned at the end of the field and started back again. Life was so short and its longings so urgent. *There was something wrong with the system.*

Maggie had the milking and all chores done for him when he unhitched and put away his team, and supper was ready when he entered the house.

"Is the corn staying green?" she asked.

"No, it's curling even in the ravines," Phil said, without looking up from the washpan at the sink. "Another week without rain will kill it all." He dried his face on the roller towel behind the door and sat up to the kitchen table. Electra already waited hungrily, her fair, Feldtmann face and short yellow braids a few inches higher than the checkered surface of oilcloth. Phil set aside the vase of flowers always in the center and

made space for the platter of fried ham and bowls of boiled potatoes and string beans Maggie brought hot from the stove.

"I found a few zinnias coming into bloom to mix with the phloxes," she said as she sat down.

"So I see."

Dutifully he held the dishes one by one for Electra to serve herself. The butter was threatening to run off the saucer and would not stay on her knife so she used her spoon.

"Tell him what happened today," Maggie said. She raised her eyebrows knowingly to Phil.

The little girl put down her slice of cornbread, blue eyes suddenly big. "Old lame Biddy came in with a whole lot of chicks! Fifteen!" She held up both hands spread wide, then closed them and opened one again. "They're all mine, too, 'cause I seen them first."

"That's nice," Phil said. He looked at the food taken on his own plate, stirred it and managed to swallow a few bites before he laid down his fork.

"Aren't you hungry?" Maggie asked.

"No, I can't eat. It's the damned heat and all the water it makes you drink. You can't keep a jug cool in the field."

"Maybe Electra could take you out some fresh."

"It's too far. It would be hot before she got there." He poured a glass of the milk Maggie had cooled at the well. That he sipped as he minced over his meat and gravy until the others finished.

When Phil rose from the table he went outside to the stock tank, undressed and washed his body, drew on clean overalls kept fresh for evening hours. Shirtless, the suspenders clung to the still wet skin of his shoulders, white to the circle of his burned throat. The work clothes he hung up sweat clammy would dry stiff with salt stains by morning.

Phil's eyes fell on their little garden a hundred yards down the slope, and the vision rose of Maggie with sweating face and bucket in each hand, carrying water from the well to keep it alive. The flower plot at one end was in the star pattern he had shown her on his first evening call at Mike Kelly's. The whole bed was as clean as the rows of vegetables and the soil black with wetness from her evening's drenching. Sight of the same bright colors as had filled the vase angered him. Better to have spent her time and labor on something for their table or to can for winter while the plants would still grow. The sun would cook everything to death before long, watering or no watering. You just could not carry enough. Trees were the only thing that rooted deep enough to live. Then he thought of the frozen mud of Dean York's yard that first morning of his arrival in Kansas, the mire of the spring thaw, and the stickiness clogging his spade

when he stamped it into the earth to plant a shrub. How could anyone have foretold then there would be years like this one? What could a man do when it didn't rain?

The team had finished their oats. He washed their galled shoulders and necks and turned them into the pasture to roll. It was getting dark inside the barn. He lighted the lantern to scrape collars and harness back-bands clean of sweatcake, blood and dirt packed on the leather where it had rubbed raw flesh. He put fresh hay into the mangers for morning.

When he returned to the house the light was out in Electra's room, and Maggie was sitting on the porch steps in the dusk with hands clasped about her knees, listening to the quarreling of Jeremy Hendricks and his wife which carried all the way from the neighboring farm.

"I'm so glad the skunks didn't get Electra's pet hen like we thought," she said, as Phil sat down beside her. "She hid her nest under that rock pile behind the garden, hatched every egg. I saw her this afternoon when she came out, and I went right to the house and sent Electra to pick beans so she would think she was first to find her. She came back running and screaming like the barn was on fire! Do you know what she says? She's going to raise them all by herself. They'll be a nuisance the way she'll make pets of them, too, always around our feet; but I think we ought to let her."

"Whatever you like."

Maggie spoke again, timidly. "Don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right."

"You haven't seemed yourself lately, and each day you become more changed." She hesitated but a fear forced her on. "Phillip, is it your New York wife?" Maggie never called her by name.

"No. That's too long ago. Everything is too long gone—or too far ahead." He had closed the topic, unwilling to bring up even their mutual problem of debts. Once and once only, shortly after marriage when prospects of a profitable sale seemed not far off, he had tried to tell her something of what remained struggling in his heart; but his feelings for his past law studies were as incomprehensible to her as a foreign language. At suggestion of returning East to set up practice a look pitiful with fear had entered her face. He was glad that it was too dark now for him to see into hers or her into his.

After a while Maggie sighed and went inside to her nightly passage of Scripture, leaving him sitting with one elbow on his knee, his hand supporting the pipe gone cold but still held in his teeth.

When Phil went inside to bed long after her, he found that draft had

closed the bedroom door, and when he opened it the wave of oven-like heat which struck his face drew from him an oath. In the light of kerosene lamp burning near her on the bureau beside her Bible, Maggie was sleeping heavily, unaware of the rivulets of perspiration running across her face. She stirred at sounds of Phil propping the door open with a chair and half awake raised the back of one hand across her eyes. "What is it, Phillip?"

"It's too goddam hot in here to breathe—and that lamp doesn't help it any." He crossed over and seized a quilt from the adjoining closet. Then he blew down the chimney to put out the flame and left to make a place for himself in the yard.

Endless scorching days that left houses too hot to sleep indoor burned even the wheat crop to failure that year, for no more than a few showers fell during the whole wretched summer. In cornfields surface soil, stirred by the cultivator shovels to provide a dust mulch, turned ashen; and the leaf blades above drooped and rustled like strips of brown wrapping paper, then broke off the stalks and blew away. The wind swept clean the layer of exposed, loosened earth from the fields and piled it in drifts along fence-rows. Skeleton clusters of bared roots at the base of the cornstalks still clung for a while to the hard-pan; then they too snapped, and the withered stalks themselves disappeared. By the end of August, the list of farms for sale filled columns in the *Plainsboro Chronicle*.

When Phil returned from town the afternoon the Eastern Loan Association raised interest rates as a premium for renewing his mortgage, he stayed in the barn until dark, staring at figures he penciled again and again on the clean pine walls of his empty grain bin. No matter how calculated, he could not estimate enough from sale of his cattle which he could not possibly fatten for butchers. He said nothing of the increase in their burden to Maggie at supper and in bed lay flat on his back with eyes wide open in the darkness until she had gone to sleep. Then he slipped out and sat on the steps until dawn and time to bring in his team from the pasture.

Maggie would have to know sometime, and at the breakfast table while Electra still slept, he tried to tell her. Maggie's brown eyes grew troubled but did not reflect his own dark fears even at his warning: "We may lose everything."

"We'll save more," she said.

"A few pennies here and there won't do it," Phil said impatiently.

"They'll help. It will rain again; it always does. Then everything will

get all right." It was a simple, trustful tenacity—something akin to the spirit of a big, noble dog.

"Times will never get right as long as the damned moneyed men control the country! Someday the people are going to rise up and rebel!" Phil saw bewilderment and shock enter her face at his viciousness and profanity, and he struck out blindly. "If I ever get out of debt, by God, you'll never see me mortgage anything again. I've a mind to tell them to take the damned land!" Real fear took over in her expression at his threat, and for a moment of compunction Phil locked his jaws. When he opened them again his voice was so quiet that it sounded cold-blooded. "I'm going to try to keep our cattle alive through the winter, and maybe the loan company will take a mortgage on them for a few interest payments when we run out of money. If they won't, we'll be finished."

Phil left the house to hitch onto his mower. His acres of native prairie which he had refused all neighborly advice to plow up and put to crop served him now. The bluestem stood only knee high, sunburned and dry as chaff, but still fair roughage for livestock. All morning he mowed and raked and came back to the house feeling a little hope. "Those damn fools who broke up the best hay meadow in the world to plant timothy will see what they've done this year!" he said. "I'm going to cut every forkful I have and stack what I can't get inside the barn."

Maggie winced at the satisfaction he took in this foresight of his, afraid to express her own sympathies for those worse afflicted; but Phil read part of her feelings, and it incensed him afresh that anyone could be so injured to life on the plains. It was unfortunate that Maggie should choose that same noon hour to venture complaint that Electra had not been minding well. Phil pulled the child across his knees and spanked her with a vigor which drained the blood from his wife's face. Electra caught her breath when he set her down and began to scream. The man shook her by the shoulder.

"Shut right up," he ordered fiercely, "or I will give you something to beller about! You're too big for that."

The girl backed away terrified, her hands pressed to her seat. Maggie managed to get her into the other room, and her husband stamped off to the barn. The woman was trembling with fright in her turn. She would have doubted Phil had any love for his daughter except that he had tried to defy with the same violence the public pressure that had compelled him to bring her home from the village to the decrepit sod schoolhouse. She would never forget that awful day when the self-appointed delegation of advisors had called, her own father leader and spokesman. Phil was just in from the field. He stood beside his team and listened stonily.

"She's a likely child," Arch had finished, "and gittin' old enough to notice things. We thought you ought to be taking her respectable surroundings into account."

"The Karns's are respectable, aren't they? Anyway you neighbor with Ez, and Irene Barker was respected until she had a baby by young Karns."

The group shifted about.

"If it isn't decent for a couple to love and have children without marriage, it isn't decent with it, and the words a preacher says over them don't make it either right or wrong."

"Why man, that's blasphemy! In the *Testament* it says—"

Phil had shut him off with a sweep of his hand which included all. "You gentlemen look after your families, and I'll take care of mine!" He had turned on his heels and led the horses away.

"If they'd pay enough taxes to provide a school out here that was worth a damn, I wouldn't have her any place but at home," Phil had told Maggie later in the evening.

"I'm proud of what you did, Phillip; I only hope it doesn't lead to more trouble."

It had led to that exactly when Electra entered the primer class for the spring term. Some of the older children there shunned her, and Hal Barker took up her cause with his fists. Hal was subdued by force of numbers, and the old scandal thus re-opened, Irene Barker withdrew her son to be taught at home.

"I knew how the grown people would feel, but I would never have believed children would be so nasty," Maggie had said when it was over.

"They wouldn't if brought up right instead of like animals," Phil said. "You can bet they learned it from their folks at home!"

It was the first time the brute power of social criticism had been forced upon Phillip Garwood. Maggie was grateful now that he had tried to fight it. It was proof of something in him which, more and more through hardships of the drouth, she needed proved for her.

When autumn had half gone with still barely enough fall rains to wet the surface for plowing, Phil brought up the question of his hiring out for wages. It was in the evening after Electra had been put to bed, and Maggie sat near him beside the kitchen stove knitting. Since supper Phil had brooded steadily into the fire in the grate above the hearth, and he spoke abruptly without change of posture.

"We'll have to have more money for interest than we can possibly get from the Loan Company on our cattle. There is no use even asking them until later. I've inquired everywhere, and the only job I can find

is on a new railroad being built in Nebraska. Do you think you would be all right here without me for a while?" He heard the clicking of her needles cease. "There won't be much to do. I can get up extra fuel for you, and I'll see the Yorks about having somebody come over every few days."

"Will it be hard work? I wanted you to have a rest this winter."

"Don't worry about me, for God's sake," Phil said. "It's you to look after yourself." His voice had risen and he turned to face her, but Maggie was looking at her hands in her lap. "I'm sorry. It's the time we should be together more than any other. If you say stay—"

"No, I know you have to go. I'll be all right. Doctor MacGregor said I was getting along fine, and Electra can run over to a neighbor if anything did happen."

"Except during the day while she's in school," Phil reminded.

"That's only for a few hours." Maggie did look at him then, squarely, and he saw with relief that there were not going to be any tears; but there was a deep loneliness against which he stood condemned and helpless. "I'm not afraid, Phillip."

"I believe you are the only woman in the world who would say that," he told her.

Phil left the next week and did not return until late in December when their son, Clarence, was born. Andy York sent the telegram and met him at the station to drive him home.

The bed had been moved into the kitchen which, to save fuel, was the only room heated. Maggie lay propped against pillows, her chocolate red hair in two thick braids across her white-muslined shoulders. Her brown eyes were tired but happy—and ridiculously excited. To her this little crumb of life, so helpless yet perfect in itself, was the most mysteriously wonderful happening in the whole universe. She held out her hand to Phil, and it shook when she released it and opened a corner of the bundle on her arm to exhibit the baby, jealously even to her husband. The little red fists twisted at once and the mouth puckered.

"He's a Christmas present, almost." She drew the blanket protectingly back into place.

Phil, standing in open overcoat beside the bed, looked back into his wife's strong, homely face radiant in motherhood, and a lump rose into his throat. "Did the doctor say everything was all right?"

"We didn't have him out. Ma thought it wasn't necessary; it's so far and he charges ten dollars—" She was stopped by the swift, violent change of his countenance.

"Your own mother thought you didn't need—you were trying to save— And then *she* went off and left you alone today!"

"She went home to get supper a little bit before you got here. We knew you were coming, and Andy had said Dean would bring Emma over this evening. They're keeping Electra." She tried to laugh to reassure him. "Women always have babies. Mrs. Hendricks and Grandma Karns were here with me too when he was born."

"Yes, Hendricks and old lady Karns. Suppose something had gone wrong? Those damned old women don't know as much as cattle!"

Maggie did not try to answer further though he waited. His fists relaxed after a time. His voice was gentle but none less final when he spoke again. "I would never have left had I suspected this. Don't you *ever* dare risk your life for dollars again!"

Chapter 10

Phil sat with Maggie the latter half of the night to give Aunt Emma York her share of rest. Maggie turned her head so that her gaze would remain upon him when he took his place beside the bed. Phil put his hand under the quilt to rest on one of hers, and all her restlessness of the evening disappeared. She was still sleeping so soundly at dawn that he placed a hand on her forehead to arouse her when the baby awoke hungry. While she nursed him, with her gaze on Phil, he told her he was not going back to work in Nebraska. "Our cattle are worth more than the advance needed to carry us on to another crop. If they won't accept them as security for that much, they won't at all. I belong with my family, and it's where I'm going to stay regardless."

"I'm so glad," Maggie said. Love shone rewarded and peaceful in her face, a look that followed him as he went to call Emma and did not leave while he dressed to do chores.

After breakfast while Aunt Emma washed dishes, Phil endorsed his last check from the railroad over to the Loan Association, as he had the others, and enclosed it with a letter requesting a loan. Two weeks later he received a registered rejection with the official ninety-day notice of foreclosure.

Phil opened the envelope on the porch of the post office-drygoods store, and his first panic at the contents seemed unreal, strangely like a dream. He looked at the papers again and saw as if behind a desk inside the Eastern finance office the credit letters being dictated from tabled statistics on the drouth and feed shortage. "I told them I had hay enough," he muttered. "There's no way you can take them out and show them from away off here." Then unexpectedly as if from an uncertain breath of air passing over him, Phil felt an element of release. He could go back

now, into one of those offices himself. I can be shrewd and cold-blooded with the best of them, he thought. God knows I've had the experience.

Phil filled his lungs shakily and put the paper into his pocket. For the first time in his life he wanted whiskey. Not just a drink but a bottle for his long drive home while he buried the present and revived the future. He felt the good weight in his pocket of the three silver dollars remaining after groceries from sale of butter and eggs. They were unneeded now in Maggie's jar of coins on the pantry shelf, hoarded for the next interest payment.

As Phil looked down the line of slanty, weather-beaten store porches toward the main saloon, his gaze passed and came back to rest on the one new front—Plainsboro's first bank, opened only that fall. Its fresh hunks of native limestone were gray as the dry sod from beneath which they had been quarried and into which their foundations were set. They walled in the vault with its money, from farmers who entered the bank and came out again cursing President George Foster. It would only be another useless humiliation to apply there, Phil told himself, at the same time that another voice whispered of responsibilities to his family— You can show him as you could not the Loan Company. He thought of Maggie's face as it surely would look again when he told her his decision to move to New York. It might serve to lessen her pleadings just to have tried the bank.

In the small conference room into which Phil was ushered, President Foster introduced himself from across a plain, oak table. He was young looking despite a thinning of his brushed hair, and he listened with pale, impersonal eyes that Phil distrusted even before he stated his request and started to enumerate his securities. Foster halted him there, turned his chair to a file drawer for a folder from the G section which he laid open before him.

"Garwood, John P., formerly of New York and the Anderson Brokerage?"

"Yes," said Phil, flushing.

"Principal collateral: 640 acres, 40 timbered and 600 native grass. New house and barn. 60 head of stock cattle, heifers. Encumbrances: first mortgage of \$5,000 at 18 percent held by Consolidated Loan Association of Jersey City. Second mortgage, none." He paused then added deliberately, "Community tenure: unsettled. Any corrections?"

"No. You seem to know me and my business as well as I do."

"Certainly." Foster did not look up from the calculations he had begun. "You have a wife and two children, Mr. Garwood?"

Phil, in his resentment, did not answer. While he waited his pride

urged him to shout, "Go to hell," and leave before he could be refused, and he had gripped the arms of his chair in act of rising to do so when the banker looked up.

"Yes, I think we can handle this for you." Purposefully he caught Phil's eyes. "I'll need a day to go over the papers—making sure everything is in order as we reviewed it."

Phil felt a heat wave to his face at the intimation. He finished movement to his feet furious with suspicions. "You will find the facts as stated—and if you're after my land I wish you'd take it now!"

"I am not after your land, Mr. Garwood."

The banker's voice did not rise as Phil had heard his own do; and because in looking at him Phil saw no antagonism his anger subsided. "Shall we discuss terms?" he heard Foster ask.

Phil sat down again, uncertain to believe or disbelieve. He heard his interest rate reduced to twelve percent, the original rate of the loan company, and a promise of further funds if needed for seeding his next crop. "That may be necessary if you hold your heifers for premium prices for re-stocking pastures after spring rains."

"I have plenty of hay to carry them," Phil assured him.

"I know you have."

By God, he's sharp, thought Phil.

Foster saw the look on Phil's face and sat back interlacing his fingers across his flat vest. "People call me a hard man to deal with," he said, "but they come to me with debt loads too heavy for them. I have to be careful. I intend for my bank to grow with this community into a sound part of it. You are *one* who can pay out with enough time. If you would really rather sell and unburden yourself, I'll find a buyer for you, but you will not be forced." He rose and held out his hand across the table. "I never disguise or evade a contract."

Phil's decision not to return to the railroad crew would have proved fortunate even if it had not led to his change to local banking. The New Year brought a raging blizzard so blinding that he stretched a wire from house to barn as a guide line, and his cattle would have died before help could arrive.

That first storm was only an opener; and when two weeks later the clouds scattered for an afternoon following a second blizzard, Henri Loubet drove into Phil's snowbound yard in his hayrack mounted on planks for runners. He stopped close before the house, and Phil stepped out in his shirt sleeves as far as the porch to greet him. "Tie your team and come in," he called.

"I can't take time," Henri said. "The weather may close in again 'fore night. I came to see if you'd sell that stack of hay you got?"

"I'm holding that for Bruno Haeckel," Phil said.

"All of it?"

"Yes, that's what he said." Phil came forward to the steps, his shoulders screwed up and shivering.

"It don't seem fair for just one neighbor to get all of something so scarce," Loubet said. His black eyes under his cap bill were red and watering from the wind, and his lips were dried and blackened. "My milk cows are drying up already on just fodder. I fenced in every foot of ground I had last fall, hoping I could run my herd through on what picking they could find, but it's all buried."

"I'm sorry, Hank, but Haeckel spoke first. I'll tell you where you might get some. John Freeman has extra hay, if it isn't already sold."

"But I'm here now, and you got so much," Loubet said. "There's no tellin' when I can get over to Freeman's as far as that is. Dutch Haeckel lives closer to him anyway. I'll raise the price."

"There's no use talking. I can't sell you what I've already promised to Bruno," Phil told him. He hesitated. "I'll tell you what. Pull in along side the barn, and I'll spare you a small jag of my own from the mow to carry you through the next days. That's the best I can do."

"I'd sure be obliged."

"Just a minute till I get my coat on, and I'll help you."

When Phil returned from pitching on the load, Maggie was sitting nursing the baby and looking through the kitchen window at the clumsy hayrack moving off northward toward new gathering clouds. "His poor, hungry cattle!" she said. "Couldn't you give him another load?"

"I wish I could," Phil told her. "He almost begged when he saw my loft half full, and got sore when I wouldn't let him have it. I'll be down to the last forkful by spring if the storms keep up, and a man has to think of his own animals first."

On through January and February that winter again and again it snowed, and men everywhere worked desperately to save their skinny, bellowing herds and nickering horses. Over and over they dug out sheds and cleared feed lots bare to utilize every scrap of fodder. As they wallowed and shoveled at drifts the snow melted into their clothing and wet them through. Shoes dried behind the stove became stiff and the green leather curled unless soaked nightly in melted tallow. Tallow served also to grease hands and faces where skin chapped and broke open and to soften frost-bitten teats of milk cows. Roads, after being twice broken, were simply accepted as impassable.

Across the white waste, rabbits and quail died of starvation and exposure by thousands. The coyotes could not eat frozen carcasses and grew lank. They invaded poultry houses, gnawing through door panels and fighting dogs in desperation of hunger. Yet, falling on the countryside stricken barren of cover the snow was destruction for insects; and it was also moisture. Smothered under the white blanket the earth could not freeze dry, and the spears of Red Turkey wheat unstooled and precariously rooted by scanty fall showers were safe against winter killing.

Spring came in season, and the bodies of upland game and livestock rotted in the sun. But once more the draws and creeks ran water for days like little rivers; and the gulls, those harbingers of crops, appeared in flocks of thousands. They swarmed along behind disks and plows, darting down to snatch cutworms and uncovered beetles from the freshly turned earth. Fortune had begun to smile and kept on smiling as timely rain followed rain. Nature, as if drunk from her change to generosity, overflowed her abundance. Surviving cattle, so weak they tottered as they walked, were given to graze knee-deep in new growth bluestem.

From near and far buyers came to Phil's door, near penniless and desperate for heifers to renew lost herds. By two's and three's he sold them off with Maggie listening miserably while he haggled for cash.

"Those poor, poor people," she said one day as he came inside after he had refused three sales in succession on credit. Phil had stood and watched the last man drive away in his battered wagon, head and shoulders slumped as he sat on the spring seat; and the reproach in Maggie's voice added to the rankling of his own conscience.

"Do you want me to give them away!" he shouted. "I can't ship—the bottom's clear out of the beef market in St. Joe." He calmed himself when she shrank. "It's little enough they're bringing. I need dollars to pay interest and hang on for you and the kids."

"You said Mr. Foster had fixed things for us."

"He's giving us a chance," Phil said. "You can't expect more than that." He saw again in her face that the transaction had only reinforced her belief that there had always been ways to carry on. He gave her a look of anger before turning and stalking back out of the house.

Through May and June the landscape greened with crops, then mellowed—lay under the sweltering July sun a boundless checkerboard painted in green squares of cornfields and the gold of ripening wheat. On into autumn, fires of burning strawpiles threw red glares against night heavens, and morning air smelled smoke. Ears sagged down on cornstalks while the parent plant yet thrived green. The fields showed Kansas in her glory.

Yet overrunning this scene of abundance was an invasion of old-time covered wagons. Singly, by pairs, and in caravans with canvas flapping

and protruding stovepipes smoking they went past. Stopped by drouth barrier the previous summer, the movement now burst westward in a flood. By late summer they were still coming and earlier migrants already returning. In wagon colonies on village outskirts they over-taxed charity and were told to move on. Along country roads they met and talked, the hopeful with the disillusioned. At farmhouses they asked together to water teams at stock tanks, for permission to camp by the roadside, and increasingly often begged food. "Where can we find fields to plant? With a farm like this a man's family could eat." But the era of free lands was running out.

"I'll never get to leave here now!" Phil told himself from his too clear understanding of the poverty the Panic had recreated in the East. "They have come without money to buy. It has happened all over again!" Savagely, he tried to drive away the ghosts of his early self, specters that would not stay buried. "You are getting older," they kept reappearing to whisper, "and someday you will die. To-morrow, or next year. Then what of all the things you planned to do?"

This time he was not so alone in his fierce resentment. That following winter from notes and mortgages unpaid and the farmers burning corn again for fuel there flamed up widespread, unreasoning indignation. Drouths and insects were understood hazards, but if there were no profits still with good yields, would there ever be? White sugar, riding plows, sewing machines, windmills, and more had appeared; some sampled, all at the finger tips—for a price. So very, very many improvements beckoning to people who were sickened of drudgery and sorghum and isolation.

Phil's and Maggie's names were next on the list under Andy's and Dean's on the petition Andy circulated and sent to the Gresham Communications Corporation for demonstration of the first rural telephone to the community. A barbed fence wire had been insulated to serve as a line to Ross Overbrook's, and Phil left Maggie with the crowd of women there while he went on to Dean York's, where the men were to gather for the business conference. His uncle's yard was full of teams and vehicles. Inside both the parlor and dining room visitors were standing in discussion groups from lack of enough chairs.

Phil joined Andy near the table where Superintendent McGurdy sat waiting, and silence spread across both rooms when McGurdy rose and announced the price of a line. Immediately Ezra Karns, who had held a chair with him, stood up too. "I'd say you couldn't find a family at this meeting that doesn't need a phone bad." He looked about giving time for the wave of nods to his statement. "But Mister, we don't have that kind of money out here."

"According to my figures on wire and poles," Andy said, "You're asking five times the cost of a line besides the yearly fee."

"I don't set prices," McGurdy said. "I quote the Corporation's offer to you."

"And folks who can't afford to triple the big guys' money for them can just do without! Is that it?"

"I don't believe the policy is intended to be unfair—"

"Why did you take sole charter rights to Plainsboro if it wasn't to keep anybody from underbidding you?" An indignant stir followed Andy's last words.

The superintendent looked uneasily at the circle of hostile faces almost fencing him in. "Look, I don't want to quarrel with you people. You petitioned the district office for a demonstration, and I was sent out to give it. That's as far as I have anything to do with it." He sat down and began putting together his papers.

The gathering broke up with folks starting home angry. Phil was still muttering to himself when he stopped at Overbrook's for Maggie. Sitting bent forward on the spring seat with his eyes on the flowing backs of his team, he did not notice her wistful, distant gaze as she rode beside him with Clarence asleep on her lap until she spoke. "It would have been awful nice to talk to neighbors. Why wouldn't they sell us a phone?"

"It's the way of all big corporations," Phil said. "They won't put a dollar into anything unless they get three or four back out. Damn them, they don't care about the people or good of the country. Two hundred dollars for a telephone! It doesn't cost them fifty!"

"Most any folks could scrape up fifty," said Maggie. "Why don't they just build a line themselves?"

Phil straightened. "That's an idea, you know it! It's not like a railroad. We could do the work ourselves and it might not cost even fifty. Yes sir, I'm going to talk to Andy. He's good at organizing, and we might get enough people together."

Maggie knew little in detail of what developed through the next couple months. She was "expecting" again noticeably and had reached the stage of "staying in."

Phil, however, was out much of the time with Andy, circulating a petition for a home owned telephone company. "Why shouldn't we build it and keep the profits in our own pockets?" he argued.

"It's time we got together and acted instead of waiting," Andy urged in turn. "Look how Bryan is getting things done in Nebraska by organizing!" With those hardest headed he sat down fervent and homespun

with patience Phil recognized he could never have used. "You might not take a thousand dollars for your phone in case of sickness. Bill Addison's kid died of diphtheria while he was driving to town for Doc MacGregor. And think of how much time it would save on getting neighbors to help thresh or on locating binder repairs at the stores."

Finally a meeting was held at the schoolhouse for a canvass on subscriptions to shares. Phil and George Foster were chosen to compose the legal documents to be filed with county and state, and the *Independent Field and Dell Company* was incorporated.

The wire was strung by the members on their own cottonwood poles cut and hauled from the river.

The same evening that the first section of the system was completed, Phil brought home a new phone with glistening nickel bells and hoisted it to the waiting wall hooks in the dining room.

After supper with little Clarence rocked to sleep, Maggie stood with Electra behind Phil, holding the lamp for him, and in wonder watched him handle pliers and screwdriver to install the batteries among the complicated innards of the magic box. Its varnish of dark oak finish shone dully in the yellow light. Finally he snapped shut the door and began to connect some wires sticking out from the wall above.

"You'll soon be able to talk a blue streak with other women," Phil told her, "but you can't get folks north of us for yet a few days." Finished, he dropped his tools into his side pocket and put his hand to the crank; then he stood aside without turning it. "Our ring is a long and three shorts. You be the one to try it, but listen first."

"I get to talk next," Electra said.

Maggie set down the lamp and stepped forward hesitantly, and on lifting the receiver heard an exchange of voices. "It works," she cried. After a few moments of listening, she said, "I wish they'd finish their foolish chatter."

He slapped his hand quickly to the mouth piece. "Sh-h-h. They'll hear you. You've got the receiver down!"

"I don't care if they do! They don't need to talk that long."

Phil laughed. "It's liable to get twice as bad when all the wives get their phones."

The next day and the next the crews worked and the line lengthened, crept straight toward Plainsboro in face of Superintendent McGurdy's warning they would not be allowed to enter town. As they neared the village, he readied a court injunction, but building ceased at the last farmhouse outside city limits. With final pole anchored and guyed as for the end of the line, the farmers settled down with their rural system. Then one morn-

ing later, McGurdy awoke to learn that the line had been extended to Main Street.

The Square at the scene of accomplished fact was filled with Field and Dell stockholders to back Andy and his night-working crew when McGurdy came with his linemen to pull down the wire.

"Possession is nine points of law," Phil told him. "We're here. If you want us out you can bring ouster suit."

"You know what a jury of our peers will say," Andy added.

"And if you'd rather battle it out here in the street," shouted Douglas Palmer, balancing a spade in his hands, "we can protect our rights that way too!"

With tension mounting, Dean York stepped forth and stood before the superintendent. The gray stubble of Dean's cheeks matched the tufts of white hair curling out from under the sweat band of his felt hat. "We don't want trouble," he said, "but if you touch one of our wires now or later, the state militia couldn't keep a pole of your own standing in this county. You'd do well to tell your company that."

"You're without store connections," McGurdy pointed out.

"We'll get them," Dean said. "Store keepers that don't put in our phone won't get any of our business."

The two men looked each other in the eyes steadily for a moment, and then McGurdy led his linemen away.

Jubilation over the local victory urged on the movement to unite in action, disappointing Maggie in her simple hope that Phil would return in peace to domestic duties once the telephone war was ended.

When the second baby was born at the Garwood home early in the spring, they named him Shannon after Maggie's Irish grandparents on her mother's side. Phillip Jr. had been agreed on in case of another boy, but after his arrival Maggie changed her mind. Left alone, she had peeped privately at the chubby mite with his blue eyes and scattering of red hair which so much favored her mother's people, then lay back tired and still. In the other room the blunt, old country doctor had finished telling one of his risqué stories, and she heard the struggle with repressed laughter of embarrassed neighbor women. Maggie could picture the droll humor on his ugly, honest face. MacGregor was leaving, for he had taken his black satchel from off the bureau; so everything had been all right.

Maggie looked again at the baby's face and longer this time. Relaxed with the blue eyes closed in sleep it was not the same. There seemed to be already in the curve of his jaws a grace foreign to her but not to his father. She snuggled him jealously and remembered his eyes. "You're not

a Palmer or a Garwood," she told him before she shut the blanket. "You're going to be a Shannon right out like me." Shannon Garwood! John Shannon, to leave a little part for Phil. She squeezed him just to feel him squirm. I'll ask Phil before Doctor MacGregor comes again to make out his report, she thought.

Phil indifferently agreed to the new name. The political air had become charged by the new People's Party emerging from union of Granges, Farmers' Alliances, and Greenbackers. His talk was all of elections. With Andy he made speeches at schoolhouse rallies, and as local leaders they had been elected for the Plainsboro meetings with State figures called by George Foster, Party chairman.

"You've got to come listen tonight," he urged Maggie as soon as she could go out. "The Populists are going to stop big trusts from bleeding the people and taking our money back East. We're going to have something to say about that now and all these mortgage foreclosures! When the Party gets organized there are going to be laws passed, or we'll send a new Coxey's Army fifty miles long marching on Washington! We're going to make the government tax profits away from the middlemen."

On the speaking platform, still wiry and black mustached but with lines now which had deepened his eyes, Phil was in striking contrast with the banker—well-preserved with gray, clean-shaven impassive face.

Maggie disliked Foster as soon as she saw them together and said so on the way home from the schoolhouse.

"He saved our farm for us," Phil reminded her.

"Anyway, I wish you weren't with him so much."

"Why?"

Cornered and feeling him displeased, Maggie held baby Shannon closer and twisted uncomfortably on the wagon seat. "He's—he's not like real folks," she said at last.

"He certainly doesn't believe in just planting and waiting for rains and prices, if that's what you mean," Phil answered shortly.

Phil did not ask Maggie to the next Grange meeting or the next. She stuck to her mending in the kitchen when the banker called at their home the following week in company with a stranger, and Phil seated them in the living room without introductions. He talked hurriedly and guardedly to Andy over the telephone; and when he arrived promptly with Dean York, Phil closed the door to her and the children. Maggie overheard Ezra Karns's name mentioned several times and the banker's voice proposing something to Phil, urged upon him also by Andy and his father. After a moment of silence Phil had said distinctly, "I am not now in a

position for that, gentlemen." Following that the talk had become unintelligibly subdued, and she took the children off early to bed.

While Maggie lay waiting for Phil and sleep, the men sat around the dining room table into the night. She heard his clatter at the stove and smelled coffee. I should have made that for them, she thought guiltily—and I could have made them hot doughnuts too. When at last Phil came in and undressed in the dark, she lay motionless without making a sound until sure he was no longer awake.

All next day Maggie was troubled by the pressure of exciting preoccupation she sensed within him, and in the evening she tried to ask about the next Grange meeting.

"It's on more silver and paper money." Phil answered as if he but half understood, then turned surprised. "Were you thinking of going?"

Maggie nodded too eagerly. "I never did see how it makes a difference to us. It doesn't matter at the stores whether you have gold or greenbacks."

Phil's eyebrows lifted, widening his gaze upon her into a stare which mellowed to a smile. "Look, Mother, you don't have to go sit there with the kids to listen and get tired." He put his hand out to hers and squeezed the finger tips. "When they have another program of singing and music with a supper, I'll let you know."

Relieved by Phil's show of understanding Maggie stayed home but with remaining uneasiness which increased as his enthusiasm grew.

"What we need is to raise less corn and more hell!" The Party slogan shocked Maggie the more to learn that the words had come from a woman's lips, but a second summer of bumper crops was pouring grain into huge piles at station sidings to rot by the hundreds of tons. The fire of Mary Lease had fallen into a tinderbox, and hell was brewing.

As elections drew nearer, Phil broke his news one morning at breakfast. "I've filed to run on the Populist ticket for county commissioner!" He paused to enjoy the effects upon dumfounded Maggie. "Surprised? Ez Karns has put up Henri Loubet for the Republicans, and I can beat him. Andy will be in the race too, for State Representative. You'll see it all in the papers tomorrow."

Maggie twice closed and opened her mouth before words came out. "Where will we stay; what will we do? You'll be away 'most all the time."

"We'll sell out and move to Plainsboro. All the children will get better schooling. The way Electra's been shooting up tall this summer, we'll soon have to think of high school for her." He winked at the girl.

Electra's face shone and she teetered up and down in her chair. "We're going to live in town! We're going to live in town!"

Over Maggie there rushed a sick sensation as of everything stable falling from under her. "Please let's don't sell the farm, Father! We'll manage somehow to finish paying out."

Her husband looked at her severely. "Foster has found us a good buyer, the Fred Dotson family, new from the East. They came into an inheritance and have cash right here in the bank. They'll give me a thousand down and a mortgage at twelve percent. Foster has arranged everything. Well, don't you want me to make something of myself?"

Electra had stopped teetering and was staring from one to the other.

Desperate and truly sick now, her hands twisting the cloth of the apron in her lap, Maggie tried to face his surprised displeasure. "Yes, I do—but you don't know yet. You might not even get elected."

"You don't think I'll do better than Henri Loubet!"

"No, no, Phillip. I don't mean that."

Phil got to his feet, jarring the table against Clarence's high chair as he did so and making the small boy jump. It spilled oatmeal from his clutched bowl down the napkin bib.

"Well, dammit, what do you mean!"

Electra cringed. Maggie could face him no longer. Her gaze lowered and the corners of her mouth began to twitch. "I don't want to leave here. It's our home, everything we have."

There was not another sound for a moment until Clarence began to whimper. Maggie heard Phil suck hard on a corner of his mustache, and when his voice came it seemed quiet as the room had been.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot stay chained to this grind of sweat and dirt that brings hardly enough money to keep interest paid, and I thought you'd be glad to be rid of your hard work, too. Twelve years I've waited for land to rise! I always wanted to get into law or politics and do something worth doing. I turned forty this summer, and if I don't take this chance to get started, I may never get another. I hate farming!"

Chapter 11

Not long after Phil's name appeared in the *Plainsboro Chronicle* among Populists seeking nomination, Ezra Karns drove to see Archibald Palmer and took with him Henri Loubet, Republican candidate for the same office.

"If we can get Garwood's own daddy-in-law to work agin him, it will make him look bad to strangers," Karns said on the way. "It's no use of you coming out against his Populist 'borrow and build' platform plank

for putting money into circulation. There's a lot of folks wanting the county to give them a job. They'd vote to build the new courthouse and the new school houses he wants whether they need them or not. Arch ought to have an inside track for finding out about any tricks or new fights he has up his sleeve."

It was no wild guess of Ezra's that he could enlist Palmer's aid. He had observed family jealousy of Phil's reputation; furthermore, Arch had always been a staunch Republican until Populism came in. As Ez sat back and rode settled in the buggy seat with his eyes fixed unseeing on the revolving front wheel, he was thinking that like Arch a good many other people who talked Populist had never left the Grand Old Party at heart. Yet that was not an immediate answer to the present problem.

"The way to beat a man is not to try to talk everybody generally into voting against him," Ez resumed. He spoke prophetically now for Loubet's education but without facing him. "That's like talking general principles. Nobody'll go to much bother for general principles. You got to git down to cases close to home. The way to beat a man is to git a few people believin' hard *they have* to beat him. Then they'll git out and work on their friends, folks who will listen to them. Their friends have more friends. It's like a snowball rollin' down hill."

When Karns and Loubet came around the bend into sight of the Palmer farm there was a hayrack in the newly mown meadow. Arch was at once recognizable by his immense height where he worked on the ground with Joel beside the vehicle, heaving up huge forkfuls to be spread and tramped down by Douglas on top. Ezra turned off the road alongside the hayfield and drove toward them between two of the long windrows of raked blue-stem, sun-cured and red-brown. "You let me handle this at the start," Ez told his companion.

"All right," Henri said.

Douglas was first to see them, for they saw him pause and say something to the two below. Arch shaded his eyes with his hand to look at the approaching buggy. He stuck his pitchfork upright in the sod and left the boys to finish loading while he came to meet his visitors.

"Fine looking hay," Ez said, as he drew up. "You're lucky to be getting it up without rain."

"Yes," Arch said, "it's real good as far as it goes, but I could do with more. Wish now I'd left another twenty acres of my land in grass, or even forty."

"We all do 'cepting, well, your son-in-law. I heard he sold out to make his race for office?"

"Yes, they're moving to town the first of the month."

"I remember he was the only person in the country with enough hay to fill his barn the year of the drouth," Ezra said. "He sure stole a march on the rest of us again that time."

"Him and John Freeman," Henri said. "I bought hay from John."

"I ain't sure it was all a case of thinking ahead," Arch said. "At least with Democrat John it was just laziness. He would rather hunt prairie chickens and jack rabbits any day than walk behind a plow. I never could figure how he persuaded a pretty, young gal like Charlotte to marry him—unless it was his pension."

"Funny how a few folks seem to get along as well without working as us who do, and sometimes better," Ez said. He sent a spray of tobacco juice out cleanly over the rim of the buggy wheel, rolled the quid in his cheek, and put a second squirt just as accurately, diagonally between spokes. "Democrat John's filed for commissioner as always." He chuckled. "There ain't fifty of his party members in the county. Two things you can depend on him for, never to go to work or to change politics. Now with your son-in-law, there's a chance of him winning. The Populists are getting pretty strong."

Arch had been waiting for the conversation to be brought around to politics. He gazed placidly up at Ezra. "Oh, Phil will get the nomination," he said. "He has the backing of Foster and the Yorks for the caucus. Of course, when it comes to election that's another thing; but most folks think well of the boy."

"Like I said, he's a smart fellow," Ez conceded. "I *have wondered* how well he'd do the job. I don't s'pose he'd be inclined to raise land taxes?"

"I don't rightly know." Arch stroked his sideburns and looked narrowly at Ezra. "He wants to do some equalizing on assessed valuations." As soon as he saw the remark score, Arch changed his tone. "Nachurly, it's hard to speak agin your relatives," he said, "but Phil does hang with the Yorks, and we all know they've been harping for new schoolhouses and better roads. Blame foolishness, it seems to me, grading up racetracks for young folks to run the legs off of horses on!"

"You know, Arch, speaking of roads, Hank here tells me the county aims to run a new one along my place, and he thinks they ought to jog it a mile over this way past your farm too."

"Yes," Henri said. "If we put it across the creek by your house it won't take such a long bridge nor so much grading, and I think it's time the county started buying the land for the right-of-way instead of asking farmers to donate it."

"I hadn't heard much about that new road," Arch said. He paused,

eyeing Ez for possible further concessions. "'Course, I ain't talked to Phil lately."

"Why, he's for running it down the parallel straight to West Bend. He says main roads will follow the shortest survey lines between towns someday, and he's not in favor of making crooks and turns to be straightened out later on. Now for myself, I figure they ought to run where they'll do the farmers the most good."

"In other counties where they've started the practice of buying road land, they pay pretty well for it," Henri said.

"It's no more than fair," Arch said. "Like as not they'll spoil your best acres, and anyway they would be worth more someday. I reckon you and Ez have it figured right. You know how it is though, Henri. A fellow can't hardly come right out and work agin a relative."

"Sure, sure. We wouldn't expect you to do anything to cause a family rumpus," Ezra said. He picked up his lines and tightened them. "We'll be seeing you off and on between now and election day; so we won't keep you longer from your haying."

Ezra Karns was land-poor from many farm mortgages held and overdue. All through the campaign Phil made speeches and went about among people urging public improvements; and all through the last weeks while he was speaking oftenest, Ez drove patiently about among his creditors behind the same lame and aged mare that had taken him and Henri Loubet to see Arch Palmer. One of his stops was at Ross Overbrook's place.

"Howdy, Ross," he called. He did not get out but waited in the buggy seat for the other to cross the yard to him. For a little while Ez flicked with his whip at the dirt-encrusted iron tire of the wheel, and Overbrook stood with one foot planted on the hub while they talked of weather and hard times.

"How's the election going?" Ez finally asked.

"I don't know, but I hope the Populists sweep the ticket like in Cowley County last time. Maybe they can do something to help our prices." Then Ross went on to bring up the subject of his mortgage, rather than force his visitor into first mentioning it. "I haven't made money to meet the payment. I wonder if you could give me more time?"

"A'hem— Well, that makes it bad all the way around because I haven't made money either, and I was counting on something to help pay my taxes." Ezra watched the look of dread creep into Overbrook's face. "Taxes'll be higher, too, another year," he continued reflectively, "for I look for Garwood to be elected. 'Course we can't *tell*, and if Henri Loubet

should happen to win so that there were some adjustments in the levy instead— 'Tain't likely though, him not being a Populist. Well, we'll see, Ross. Your time ain't up till January, and besides you got ninety days grace after that. Garwood might even drop out. I understand from his daddy-in-law that Maggie is plumb sick of his dive into politics and after him to quit the race. Being the kind of girl she is she'd naturally be agin the things a politician does to win." He gathered up his lines. "Well, we'll see."

Chapter 12

By a cottage window in Plainsboro, Maggie sat and wondered what time Phil would be home for supper. The election with campaign furor was past, but clerking in the hardware kept him later some days than others. Shannon was taking his afternoon nap, and Clarence and Electra were not back from school.

Maggie had cried long in secret when the farm was sold at thought of it in other hands with orchard and shrubs and buildings going to wrack. She was crying now silently into a crumpled handful of her print apron which she dabbed again and again to her eyes. Once her gaze left the street and traveled the walls of the room, but the whole interior of this rented building housing them remained coldly foreign and seemed to desecrate the familiar furniture brought into it. What did a wife do without anything to make into the home she dreamed of for her family? You had to own a house to feel you belonged in it, and you had to have space that was yours around it. Phil had said things would work out better off the farm—but they had not worked better. What could a wife do when her husband was wrong, and he could not see that he was wrong?

The pedestal on which Phil had lived with his learning and power of words began to totter in her mind.

"Oh, Phillip, Phillip!" The words burst from her audibly in her struggle to retain his pre-eminence, and her hollow of unhappiness filled, flooding her. If only they had not left the farm; if she had refused. What would happen if she refused to stay here? But a wife didn't refuse, and there was no place else to go.

Maggie thought of her parents, but they were no refuge, not even someone to confide in. Toward them she felt a rise of anger. Phil was hurting her without wishing to, but Pa and the boys had been plain mean. You couldn't blame him for saying he wouldn't go to church with people like that. Yes, Phil wanted her to be happy in town. He had let her pick

the house to live in. He had promised the thousand dollars down payment from Dotson on the farm would not be spent in politics, and she knew he would keep his word. He had tried to justify himself. "I can't help wanting to get out and be a leader any more than you can help wanting to be on the farm," he had said.

No, he can't help it, she thought, and it is because he wants to help people, to make times better and living easier for them. Sometimes you couldn't help wanting the things you wanted, or stop trying to get them. You couldn't even tell how the wanting began. It was just there, and it grew stronger and stronger inside of you like it had with him until you couldn't stand it longer. It was because he believed so strongly in the things he was doing and that she could be of no help in them that Maggie was most frightened. Phil had gone off whole days with those men he called the Party; and the thoughts he brought home were of votes, platforms and speeches. If politics could take him from his family, it could cause him to cease to love them. It could even make him wicked. Everyone said politics did that.

The void within Maggie overflowed again, this time with memories of the spectacle of the home-coming rally in the park the night before election; and because having seen she had to remember, she wished desperately that she had stayed at home. Driven by fears not till then confirmed, she had gone without Phil's knowledge and, stealing up near the fringe of the crowd, had hidden in the carriage old Dean York tied at a hitching post. She had shuddered at the bugs swarming to lanterns hung over the outdoor platform, and at thought of them crawling about the white collars of officials, shrunk from the coarse, boisterous crowd.

Maggie had never seen Phil so excitedly happy as on that night when he walked back and forth, shouting and waving his arms. It made him a stranger. Much of what he said was inaudible at her distance, but she could tell by the uproar when he scored a point. He was speaking against freight rates and interrupted by someone at the back of the crowd calling "louder." At second demand, Maggie had turned her head and recognized her brother, Joel.

Phil had responded again in good faith, raising his voice until she feared for his throat.

"They ship our machinery and other goods right through our town past us to Denver or someplace they call a distributing center," he shouted. "Then we pay extra to have it brought back. Why don't they unload it here in the first place?"

This time Joel cupped his hands about his mouth: "L-LOUD-er-r!"

Halting to the heckling, Phil had thrown up his hands for a digression.

"And above all things, gentlemen," he bellowed, "when Gabriel blows his trumpet that the end is here, there'll be some son-of-a-bitch in the background hollering LOUDER!"

The crowd whooped its cheers, and Joel had slunk away.

Maggie had heard profanity from the men folks. There was recollection of her own father dancing on one leg in the barnyard while he clutched the other with both hands the time the colt kicked his shins, and for all his piety swearing loud and long—while Joel and Douglas retreated to the farthest stall to hide their mirth. Yet in this case with Phil, his candid delivery and the applause for his epithet made her cringe.

Oil torches lighted and waving, the crowd of faces had marched away under red, smoking flames, hurrahing with Andy and Phil in the center. They had paraded Main Street, and Maggie, following later to pass the window of the saloon into which they disappeared, had seen him lined up with others, drinking and passing out cigars. Men whom she had thought never touched liquor were tipping the bottle. That night had changed her staid, little rural world into an insane asylum; and the mob hysteria frightened her the more because it was puzzling.

"Dear God," she prayed that night at her bedside. "Don't let this spoil our home. Please, don't let it spoil our—home!"

Phil had been gone again all the next day and most of the night to watch the returns. He had come home to her, still waiting up, so heavy with disappointment that he would not have needed to speak the words that he had lost. Yet he had said clearly, sparing himself nothing: "I got beat." After that he sat a while very still at the kitchen table arms crossed before him on the oilcloth, mustache sucked between his teeth, his face turned away. His next words, when they came, broke into the silence explosively. "I know who spread the lies that beat me, too. Your old man and Doug and Joel!"

Maggie felt her breath leave her.

"They told around I was to get a ten percent rake-off on lumber for the courthouse and any new school buildings I wanted."

"Are you sure?"

He looked at her, and she saw with relief that his hostility was not for her. "Ez Karns engineered it with them. Oscar Karns made bets on Henri Loubet. Oscar was in town tonight drunk, swaggering around collecting and bragging how he'd had the inside dope."

There had come another silence, and she saw the depth of his hurt in the red dryness that entered his eyes. "I can understand campaign lies, and I've known all along your family didn't like me. What I can't understand—" The words stumbled and caught because his voice began to

tremble. "What I can't understand—is why people right in my own home precinct would believe the lies! That's where I lost heaviest."

If only I had gone to him then, Maggie thought miserably, and said the right things! Even in the presence of the raw wound of his disappointment she had known that she had hoped all the time in her heart as a fearful secret that he would lose. In the first moments of that news, it had seemed that her prayer had been answered.

"Oh well," she had said, trying to speak lightly, "we can give Mr. Dotson back his thousand dollars and start over again."

"You can't do that. A mortgage accepted is a legal contract." Then he had turned some of his anger on her, with voice and the blood in his face rising together. "If you're still trying to get me to go back, forget it. I'll find a job and make a living for you, but I won't be driven back!" He had risen and stood almost over her though he controlled his voice again. "Foster wanted *me* to run for representative instead of Andy. I could have been where he is if we hadn't had the damned farm and its debts. Well, this is only one election. You'll see. I'll show people yet!" He had checked himself, clinched his jaws and strode from the room.

Several days later Andy came to say goodbye before leaving for the capital and she overheard him remarking, "I still don't know what, but there was more underhanded work in close here than that one lie about you, for I lost the home precinct, too. I only won because I had a bigger area to draw from."

"I'd rather it was you to win if one of us had to lose," Phil had said. "You can do more for the Party at Topeka than I could here. We need somebody in the legislature to keep us in touch. Do a great job there. It could be a step toward wide recognition for you. This thing is going to get even larger than state wide." They had shaken hands with Andy standing flushed with anticipation.

Maggie's brooding for the afternoon was ended by the bouncing, argumentative arrival of Electra and Clarence. She hastily wiped her eyes dry when she heard them down the street.

"How did you get on in school today?" She put the question customarily, smiling for them as they entered.

Electra answered for both. "Just fine."

Clarence, already in the kitchen at the cookie jar, came back with hands full. "T-t-take—" he halted, seeing Maggie's eyes upon him, then began again carefully. "Take a couple, Sis." Clarence had developed a stutter, most noticeable in the presence of Phil, who tried hardest to correct him of it.

They sat down at once to the sitting room center table with their books.

Even the little boy, just out of his first reader, had learned not to let Phil catch him without his lessons.

Maggie listened to their chatter and the guiding tone assumed by the girl in pronouncing Clarence's spelling words. Electra sounded like a real teacher, and he was spelling without stammering at all. A warmth spread through the house, and Maggie rose almost cheerfully to finish supper preparations when she saw Phil coming.

"The boys are meeting for a drive to reorganize the Party," he said, as he washed at the kitchen sink, "so I have to go right back this evening."

Maggie took his announcement with an inward sigh. It was starting all over again. With this daytime job in the hardware, now he would be gone at night, too.

"I'll have to work twice as hard to keep the Party on its feet at home with Andy gone," Phil told her.

At sound of his father's voice in the house, Shannon's blue eyes half asleep in his crib, flew wide open. He pulled himself up on his chubby legs at the railing, yelling for attention. Phil swooped upon him, rolled him back down and stood him on his head on the pillow. When he lifted him he tickled his fat stomach with his mustache until Shannon's squeals changed to gasps. Distracted from books, Electra and Clarence watched the commotion. Electra enjoyed it almost as much as the baby, but Clarence's thin mouth was unsmiling. He lowered his gaze when Phil set Shannon straddle of his neck and turned to them. Phil fished into his vest pocket and laid a brand new dollar watch before Clarence. "You're getting big enough to learn to tell time," he said.

The boy's lips loosened unsteadily. He spoke slowly, guarding against his impediment. "Thank you, Sir."

Phil noticed and squeezed his shoulder. "You're the man around here when I'm away."

Phil played with Shannon until supper was dished out. He sat at the head of the table and ate some hurried bites, at the same time questioning the children about school; then he went off again, leaving the roast beef hash Maggie had cooked especially for him scarcely tasted.

Chapter 13

Below Andy where he sat beside his upper floor window writing to Phil, Topeka horse cars clattered in turbulent traffic. Across the spread of city roofs the dome of the uncompleted Capitol building stood against evening sky. Andy stopped writing, and with pen raised gazed at it. Sunset rays

tipped in gold the spire with its gleaming eagle wingspread and fierce, and made the gilt-leaf dome a red bronze globe with burning edges.

Through Andy ran a feeling of profanation of the sublime for the plug-hatted politicians who streamed up and down the marble steps in daytime and of evenings loafed in hotel lobbies with ever-present cigars. "Human leeches," he had called them in his letter, "and damned if there doesn't seem as many of them getting in among the Populists as elsewhere." He continued to stare at the gilded dome. Was this how government worked? Surely not, at least not in Washington.

Andy put down his pen and read through all he had written. "Should the Party play ball with them to get legislation? What do you think? Most of us Populists are green lawmakers and those fellows know the angles. We've been in session a week with no headway.

"We control the Senate, and I thought we had the House—counting the two Democrats who usually vote with us. But the Republicans came up at the first meeting with ten election certificates from counties we had won. Ben Richmond almost had a knockdown fight over his claim before the sergeant at arms quieted the hall. The Secretary of State won't certify the roll until the question is settled, but there is no use going back to the ballot boxes. Anything could have happened to them by this time. So we've elected our own Speaker, Dunsmore, and they've done the same—chose Douglas for theirs.

"Governor Lewelling came in today and tried to compromise, but Douglas wouldn't even answer. He and Dunsmore each have a desk up front, even cots so they can sleep beside them, by God! I wish you could hear them both pounding gavels and recognizing different speakers while we all stand around yelling! People in the gallery laughed the first day, but everybody's getting mad now. Sheriff Dave Meyerhoff and all the county and city officials are strong Republicans, and a Populist is almost a criminal on the streets. Lewis Gunn was arrested this afternoon for getting into an argument downtown. We got him out on bail, but there is no telling where this whole business will end.

"You show this to Foster at Party meeting so folks can see what we're up against, not just what is in the newspapers."

Finished reading, Andy added a postscript. "Do keep in touch with Dad for me. I'm worried about his health."

When Andy took the letter to the mailbox he met a group of Populists running toward Hotel Throop led by Lewis Gunn. Gunn swept him a beckoning arm. "Come on. They've jailed Ben Richmond now!"

On entering the lobby, Andy heard muffled confusion of raised voices and crowding feet from the convention hall above. Gunn slowed panting

on the last stairs to the landing, his round face livid and moist, then spurted on and jerked open the door. Inside the hall gesturing men were joining and leaving heated groups standing everywhere, and Andy halted bewildered and half frightened by the scene of unpacifiable rebellion which had turned men's steps into angry strides and compressed their lips. He went up to Bill Stromb, whose seat was near his in the Hall of Representatives and who from the first had reminded him of Phil. "Why did Meyerhoff arrest Richmond?"

"For talking on the street, and that's free speech!"

"It don't look like the bastards could go that far," said Andy.

Stromb's dark eyes, usually so collected under his graying temples, were flashing bright. "We won fair and square, but they mean to not let us pass our laws!"

"Order. Order." The call came from the platform where Speaker Dunsmore and Attorney General Blackburn had been conferring with Lewis Gunn. Dunsmore held up his arms until the room was attentive. "The attorney general has the legal angles on this."

Blackburn stepped forward. "We can bail Ben out tomorrow like we did Lew here. They can't refuse bail, but Meyerhoff and his gang can throw some of us in everytime there's a close vote on a bill."

Andy felt seething heat of anger. "What does the Governor say?"

"He says we're not going to put up with this any longer. He has recognized our Dunsmore House."

"YE-EAAY LEWELLING!"

Cheer after cheer was still ringing when the door was thrust open, and a whole new crowd of Populists poured in with Ben Richmond riding on the shoulders of the leading pair.

"We broke into Meyerhoff's damned jail and locked up his deputies!"

Straight to the platform they bore Richmond and stood him on the desk. He waved both hands high. "Boys, we've given enough. The Governor says the legislature is ours. Let's take it!"

Lewis Gunn jumped atop the desk beside him. Both men flourished their fists, and over the room a forest of fists waved back.

"Down with the Douglas House! To hell with Meyerhoff!"

Gunn and Richmond sprang down and with Dunsmore and Blackburn headed for the door. The People's Party men poured downstairs after them. On the avenue the column thickened and packed into a cheering mob that took over the sidewalk.

Andy's heart raced. He had started well to the rear, but darted out into the street past the hitching post lane and ran ahead dodging vehicles

to catch the leaders at the Capitol's marble, moonlit steps. If Douglas is sleeping in that cot of his, thought Andy, he's sure going to get woke up.

Inside, the crowd carried him along the corridor. Lights were snapping on as he was thrust through the doorway into the Hall of Representatives, and for the flick of an instant Andy felt disappointed to find it deserted; then he pitched in with fellow Populists who with whoops fell to carrying out the Republican Speaker's desk and other furniture of the Party. When the last articles had been removed, Dunsmore told all who were not House members to leave. "It's ours now. When the Governor comes in the morning we'll assign the disputed seats. Then we'll let the Republicans in to the chairs rightfully theirs." Behind those to leave the doors were closed and barred.

Andy went to the rear row seat that was his and stood behind it with hands clamped firmly upon the back rest. He took a strong, expansive breath and gazed upon the Hall. The crowd had broken into triumphant discussion groups of men lighting up pipes and cigars, and he encountered Bill Stromb's eyes upon him. "We'll get every plank through now, won't we, boy!" said Stromb.

Andy straightened up to make himself tall. "You're damned tootin' we will!" He did not realize he was being dramatic even at the other's broad smile. Stromb's black eyes only made Andy regret that Phil was not there to share the triumph. This is one time he could have been as happy as the rest of us.

From up front Dunsmore presently addressed them again. "We'll have to quiet down and turn off the lights or be accused of holding an illegal session."

Andy continued to stand for a while after the last circle of bulbs in the big, overhead candelabra went out. Darkened, the Hall seemed vast, and the subdued spurts of human voices which began again after a moment of silence seemed to come from across distance.

While the Populist representatives settled themselves for the night, some at length stretching out upon the floor, reports of their uprising spread like a prairie fire. Hours before daybreak they could hear the cries of newsboys in the streets. "UXTRA—UX-XTR-RA! All about the Populists stealing the Capitol!"

With the first grayness of dawn when Andy aroused from a sitting nap, Republican forces were already gathering below the Hall. From a window he watched little groups in excited conversation grow into a mob that milled about the Capitol grounds. In the clean light of a spring-like February morning the events of the night began to lose luster, and he saw his

apprehensions reflected in the stubbled and red-eyed faces of his fellows. There was little talk as they walked about from window to window, and a heightening atmosphere of alarm. Andy could see no retreat from their audacious action nor from the sentiment to violence building up outside. Some Populists, too, had collected below guarding the Capitol steps, and the Hall doors had been opened to keep in contact with them, but they were too few. He and his fellows were cornered. Rumor came up that Sheriff Meyerhoff had deputized a hundred men and issued them shot-guns. Curses and threats began to greet the Populist faces peering down from protection of their second story followed by stones crashing through windows.

Meyerhoff arrived with a squad carrying sledge hammers. He motioned clear a space for himself before the crowd, and stood with thumbs hooked into gunbelts about his hips, his wide hat pushed back far on his bald head. "I'll give you fellows fifteen minutes to leave peacefully," he called up to the Hall.

"Cocky devil, isn't he?" Andy heard the words from over his shoulder and the shaky utterance balled up tighter the knot in his stomach. He leaned to the ledge for a full look at the mob behind the sheriff, and rage rose out of his fear: "God damned Republicans!" Andy heard his words spoken venomously without recognizing them as his own.

There was a sudden turning of heads below, as Governor Lewelling and the attorney general came out on the balcony of the L-wing outside his office. Lewelling was pale though composed, but Blackburn's hands shook so that he could hardly control the sheet of paper in them when he stepped forward and read the executive order of dispersal.

Meyerhoff let out a boisterous guffaw. "You got anybody to enforce that?" the sheriff bellowed up at Blackburn.

The crowd swayed, edged forward. "We're not after you, Governor," someone shouted. "You can stay, but them other bastards got to git!"

Lewelling himself started to speak. "As Governor of this state I order you—" His voice was lost in booing and yelling as the mob stormed the building.

Andy turned and ran out with several others to defend the corridor. He arrived as the rush swept up the steps over fist-swinging Populists and in through the main entrance. Behind him he heard shouts of "Lock the doors." The jar of them being slammed mingled with yells of companions at his back: "Beat hell out of them!" In the vestibule the crowd had bottle-necked with a mass pressure which thrust those in front down the corridor shoulder to shoulder. With heart pounding Andy crouched and braced himself with arms and legs spread wide from wall to wall in re-

strait of passage. The advancing front met and straightened him, turning him sidewise with men going by on right and left, their bodies squeezing and shoving him one way and then the other. He could hear oaths and blows, felt a blinding, engulfing rage for the childishness of his own resistance. He fought to get low again and then with full, unrelinquishing strength in his farm-hardened muscles rammed his shoulder into a yielding midriff. The recipient's body doubled over his in a grunt of pain. Andy reared up with it and flipped it over his back, staggering the men upon whom it fell to their knees. He managed to trip another into the pile-up before a great pair of blond, hairy arms encircled him, pinning his own to his sides and bearing him along the wall with the mob to the entrance of the first anteroom. A push sent him inside sprawling backwards on his buttocks. In the doorway from under a towering head of yellow hair two blue eyes looked at him only half maliciously. "You could get hurt out there, bub." The door closed.

Andy sat a moment dazed while trampling feet passed outside. Clearly audible came the heavy voice of Sheriff Dave Meyerhoff calling orders. "Stand back, boys. Give them room to swing."

Andy could not believe it meant smashing the beautiful new walnut woodwork leading to the Hall until he heard crashing blows. —That son-of-a-bitch! He leaped up and yanked at the door knob, and found that he had not been locked in. Andy stepped forth as the splintering double doors and part of the casing caved inward upon barricading desks, and the Republicans charged over the debris. What Andy beheld was a yelling, swearing *melée* spreading out inside the Hall, and he ran toward it. He was without knowledge of why he acted or any feeling of loyalty to cause or comrades. He merely saw a riot and rushed to take part. There were images as the stream of attackers swept him inside—fists smashing into faces, chairs and tables overturned—the giant blond stranger out in front not grinning now, swinging one hand and then the other—a whizzing inkwell that spun in the air spraying ink and hit him above the ear—the glass well dropping intact and the man's arms fallen limp as ropes before he slumped. In the center of his forces stood Meyerhoff, pointing and shouting orders.

Andy made for him, and, coming up from behind among Republicans, got through unrecognized to his side. He saw the sheriff's face turning as he swung for his temple, and his knuckles socked into the soft flesh of an eye. Meyerhoff reeled, but Andy never knew whether he fell, for surrounded by foes he was striking wildly and being struck. He fell and was trampled, got up and was knocked down again. Through a haze of blood and tears as he rose a second time groggily to his knees, he saw

scattered, remaining Populists being methodically upset out the windows. Suddenly he knew thoughts again—that he was not badly hurt yet, that there was a near twenty foot fall outside. On hands and knees he raced under seats to the free side of the room, slid over the sill till he hung by his fingers, and dropped into the shrubbery.

In the afternoon troops called out by Governor Lewelling arrived, two companies of state militia and a squad of artillerymen. Andy was among the Populists, some with bruised faces and a few wearing bandages, that hung about the Capitol grounds in little groups, watching the troops deployed and looking furtively at the Gatling gun set up on the trampled and torn lawn. Disconcerted by the suddenness of their eviction and extent of the violence which none had anticipated, they felt dismay before this prospect of wholesale bloodshed.

Meyerhoff, now with a small army of deputies, held every entrance for the Republicans barricaded within. He refused to surrender but came out willingly to meet Major Trent and receive the Governor's proclamation of martial law. Andy moved up to listen.

"I reckon, by God, I'm a proper legal officer to preserve peace," the sheriff said. "There's no more fighting going on around here now; I stopped it." He made an attempt at a grin which was pulled sideways by his swollen and purple-black eye. "You can see for yourself, Major. Everything's quiet as a sheep pen!"

Andy was most interested in Sheriff Dave's eyes. I gave you that, anyway, he thought.

Major Trent had been regular army personnel and was clearly carrying out a distasteful assignment. "I don't intend to shoot down fellow Americans for standing in front of a State house," he said, "but be damned sure you keep your fellows in line. I'm in command here. Don't forget that." Back with the Gatling gun squad he addressed the Populists. "We were called to prevent trouble; and if there is more, we'll get the men who start it. I don't give a damn about your politics. Now the best thing for you folks would be to go home." He removed the firing pin from the weapon, but he sat down beside it.

Gradually the spectators left. Andy remained until food was passed in to the garrison that evening. Then he, too, went away chilled and bruised to write an account to Phil, and the troops settled to vigil.

Next day radicals of both sides pointedly walked streets with fixed smiles for each other and guns in their pockets ready for challenge, but new clashes were forestalled by hasty agreement of Lewelling and Republican leaders to put the question of House rule before the Supreme Court.

The Republicans won the case, and a House was organized to continue the battle along less primitive lines. Only a few weeks remained for legislation but a millennium would have produced nothing. While Lewelling pleaded for cooperation, Andy saw measure after measure originated by the Populist Senate voted down by the hostile majority in the House. It was political education for him he would never forget, made doubly impressive by Phil's pessimistic verdict that right could not be depended on to win. Yet the Utopian legislation which had seemed at hand remained a promise for Andy, and life too exciting to be despaired of.

"Without total control a party has nothing," he wrote at the close of the session. "But you'll see. The people are aroused now. Next election we'll sweep the state!"

Chapter 14

When the Kansas legislature, still deadlocked, had adjourned its last session under Lewelling and angry Populist leaders met to plan total victory in November, William Jennings Bryan was already touring the Midwest in a greater new campaign. Andy had gone to Lincoln to hear him and as Chairman of the Programs Committee engaged him to address the opening party rally at Abilene.

"Bryan's been making speeches everywhere this summer, sometimes three a day; and yet he has found time to come to us!" Andy told Phil. "Folks go a hundred miles to listen to him. Just wait till you have!"

When the day came Phil sat with the audience rather than take a chair on the platform with Andy and party notables.

On the open incline before the park bandstand five thousand people waited. They sat on the short grass in long rows, women with skirts spread about them and the men with knees drawn up and shirt collars open. Under the enclosing semi-circle of trees, their children played in the late spring shade.

There was no fanfare for the hack when Andy arrived from the rail station with his towering guest, but a roar of greeting went up. Bryan stood and waved, and lifted the same wide-brimmed western hat worn by the men he greeted before climbing from the vehicle to mount the platform and shake hands with the half circle of Populist leaders. He needed no eulogy of introduction to the crowd, and Andy presented him to them simply by name; for Bryan was as much a part of those gathered for his coming as the homesteads they plowed and harvested. They had read his speeches thundered at lyceums, Granges and Alliances. They

had told and re-told the anecdotes and tales of their Great Commoner—how he had broken bread at farmhouse tables and humbly asked the blessing. Some had traveled to Nebraska to hear him, just as he had crossed the state line to come to them. On hard bench seats under the weaving canopy of Chautauqua tents he had brought to others, new hopes of God for the stature of man.

To Phil, Bryan looked like a giant, walking back and forth on the platform in yellow afternoon sunlight. There his hulking shoulders were squared, and his voice rolled in waves to the farthest fringes.

"In Washington I have heard you called traitors by Republican Party leaders, and I have answered them: 'It is true.' I have heard you dismissed contemptuously as a handful of votes, and I answered, 'Alone they are few.' I have heard you accused as visionaries, and I said, 'Yes, they have dared to dream.' And so having replied to *them*, let me say to *you*: Be proud that you have rebelled, that you stand a courageous minority—with your faces to the future instead of the past. Your liberalism is our need, not machine government of entrenched standpats and reactionaries!"

"That's telling them, Bill!"

"It must be liberalism of broadminded, energetic men united for the best interests of Kansas *and the nation*. It must be unity of all men wise enough to join hands across state, factional, and party lines. Greenbackers and Populists, the Democrat Party of the South is fighting your fight against the evil Goliath of corporate capital. Will you march with David, or see him go forth alone?" Bryan raised a fist clinched until his arm trembled. "Will you join forces now, or will you wait forever for prosperity!"

He dropped his arm and cheering rose, raised it again as a restraining palm and the cheers were stilled. For a little while Phil remained aware of the crowd and its response, of Andy sitting forward statue-like with a hand on each knee; then he himself was caught and carried along.

"You have been told," said Bryan, "that the future of the whole nation depends upon the Eastern Industrial Giant and his great cities. You have been told that the life or death of industry depends upon a gold standard. I tell you the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile acres—our cotton, wheat, and corn. Burn down those cities and from the good farms of our Mother Earth the cities will be born again; but destroy our farms and the grass will claim the streets of every city."

Before silence deep as the sky, he ceased striding and stood like a seer, motionless with hands locked behind him and his big head thrown back. Words flowed from him with that inner music of poetry. "I tell you further that the teeming masses in those cities, workers who live from sweat

of their brows like yourselves, are *not* concerned with gold standards. Their concern is for your bread that they may eat. Is a loaf less palatable when bought from a silver dollar? Those dollars we could have in an unending stream from our mines, and money we must have that people may buy and goods change hands.

"I have seen our Eastern cities in this Panic. Their banks remain closed for lack of gold to redeem family savings. No longer does smoke hang in palls of vigor above industrial suburbs. Our factory wheels are still, our ships tied up at wharves. Freight train schedules remain reduced. Our forests provide no lumber while thousands shiver for lack of roofs. Rails rust in great stacks in station yards beside the idle boxcars which might carry your bountiful harvests to hungry countrymen. All that, because the nation's monetary lifeblood has ceased to flow.

"The United States is not dead; her great heart still pulses, but she lies prostrate and her breath is slow. It is in your hands, citizens and voters, how soon she may be revived." Finished, he held out his arms to them inviting support.

Andy and the Party leaders on the platform awoke first and released the ovation as they rushed to seize Bryan's hand, before he descended for the handshakes from all. Behind the crowd Phil stood and watched, fully awakened by the surge of people past him to greet and touch their leader. Then slowly, moody and thoughtful, he walked away.

Andy saw Bryan to his train for an evening engagement in Fairbury. He remained at the station where Phil joined him to catch the local freight back to Plainsboro. Andy reproached him as soon as he arrived. "You should have come forward so I could introduce you. I wanted him to meet you so he would remember you."

"From among all those people?" Phil asked.

"They say he never forgets a face. What a man and God what a speaker! He made shivers run up and down my back!"

"Yes, he was magnificent and a spellbinder," said Phil. "I don't know how well his ideas would go over read and never heard."

Andy turned abruptly and questioningly as though he had misunderstood. "You do believe in him?"

"Yes, I believe. But that didn't get us our platform, did it?"

For the second time since the past election Andy sensed division between them on outlook. The breach seemed to have widened, and his gaze still on Phil's face became troubled. Was he still brooding inside over his defeat with failure at Topeka adding more pessimism? Andy felt he could not mention the county commissioner race, but he could speak of

the state legislature. "No, we didn't pass our platform," he answered slowly. "What we lacked was a leader like Bryan to rally us around him and keep us fired. You know, I think you could be one."

Phil stared a moment at the cinders of the station yard underfoot—stirred them with his toe. In the distance their train whistled. "I used to believe so back East," he said at last. "But politics is a full job for a man, and now I don't have the time." He turned his gaze squarely into Andy's eyes. "You still have your chance. You aren't married. Stick with your dream of going high."

"Oh, it'll stick," Andy said. "The damned thing's got roots in me." He paused and shook his head like an earnest man in acknowledgement of shortcomings. "But I don't have the imagination to plan campaigns and foresee opposition like you do."

"You let scruples block your thought. Play by the professionals' own rules." Suddenly Phil's black eyes glittered fire. "In any further part I take in politics, by God, I'm going to!"

The freight came in and they got aboard. On the short ride home Phil sat on an end bench in the corner of the caboose where the walls braced his shoulders from both sides. Andy glanced at him a couple times sunk in thought, then picked up a crumpled news magazine. He found a Washington story, smoothed out the dirty pages and folded them tight in his hand against jiggle as they jolted and swayed.

They were approaching Plainsboro when he put the magazine aside. Phil was sitting with his back hunched, one heel hooked over the edge of his seat and his elbow resting on his upraised knee. He was still smoking as he had been, pipeful after pipeful ever since entering the car. Andy sat up straight and rolled a cigarette.

Phil spoke abruptly as he saw him move. "I'm getting my land back from Fred Dotson."

"Oh?" Andy looked over his match with a puff of smoke that put out the flame. "I hadn't heard."

"No one has. Foster has handled my papers, and Dotson only told him this week of giving up on the mortgage. I guess he figures like I did that he can never pay out. My question now is whether to try again. I still have every penny of Dotson's thousand dollars down payment. Foster said to pay that much off the mortgage and hang onto the farm."

"I would," Andy said. "It's bound to be worth a lot someday."

"I know. Your dad always said that, and he may be right in the long run. But Jesus, Andy, I've been waiting ever since I came out here. It might take all the good years from a man's lifetime."

The lumbering train slowed, and the brakeman came in for their tickets.

The door slammed on his departure, and Phil gazed through the sooty windowpane into the evening semi-darkness and the familiar village outskirts. "I had about decided to move back to the farm because of the family," he said, "and then I heard Bryan and right away started thinking again of the other things I could maybe do like you said. That was why I left you at the park, to walk and think the thing over. A man has to make up his mind."

From the station, Andy went to the livery stable for his horse, and Phil went home. He ate his late supper lunch Maggie set out in the kitchen without mentioning his thoughts and started for the sitting room where Electra was at the center table with her high school books. Across from her Clarence, his last arithmetic problems finished, was constructing a layout of buildings with match sticks above the disastrous hands of clamoring Shannon. Phil stopped at the doorway grinning as the little boy tugged a stool to the table to climb within reach. Clarence gave it a push with his foot which nearly upset them both. "He was coming to help," said Phil.

"His k-k-kind of help, I don't want," Clarence said.

"Well, don't get rough with him." Phil went to the chair he always used and clapped his hands to Shannon, who forgot the tempting array on the table and in a toddling run hurled himself at his father's lap. Phil snatched him up and spilled him between his knees, and caught him near the floor to the boy's squealing delight.

Phil gave Shannon's thick, red curls a good tousling and set him down to toys scattered on the rug when Maggie came in from doing his few dishes. He felt the peace of the room as she sat down with her sewing and found it difficult to bring up the subject of the farm. He opened his newspaper in postponement. Then abruptly, impatient with himself, he lowered the sheets and announced the return of the mortgage. The incredible joy that broke across Maggie's face stopped her busy fingers.

"We can't move back on to it," Phil added quickly to forestall any further disappointment than must come. Her pleasure faded and her gaze fell, but she looked up again at once, brightening.

"You mean Mr. Dotson keeps possession for another year?"

Phil shook his head. "He can rent it for as long as he wants. If he isn't going back East, I'll tell him that when I talk to him."

"Wouldn't we do better to farm it ourselves?"

"Look, I can't put an honest man out into the road!" Phil said, irritated to be defending his course which he had hoped to establish with one statement.

"He might find another place if we helped him look for one," Maggie offered mildly.

"Well, I don't want to farm the damned thing anyhow—at least not yet!"

Maggie winced, and Phil brought his voice down to kindness. "I don't see why you want to go back to that hard work. I'm making our living at Wyatt's hardware, and we'll get some rent from the land. We've got all of Dotson's payment in the bank to lighten our mortgage load. That's a thousand dollars profit for two years we've been away, more than we ever made farming."

Electra had been listening, her attention drawn from current history notes she was reviewing for freshman finals, and her face showed puzzlement. "That doesn't sound just right, Pa."

"What doesn't?"

"About the mortgage. Aren't foreclosures one of the things you and the Populists have been fighting so hard against?"

"I did not foreclose on Fred Dotson!" Phil said. "The sheriff didn't sell him out. We had an agreement. He was to pay for the place or give it back, and he's giving it back."

"But it's about the same, isn't it? He gave it up because prices didn't rise so that he could finish paying for it."

"It is *not* the same!"

Maggie gave her stepdaughter a warning look, and Electra argued no further. In the silence Phil fingered his newspaper, and after he had raised it Electra and Clarence exchanged glances across the table.

"I hadn't thought about rent from the farm, Father," Maggie murmured. She was beginning to feel almost satisfied, now that they were to have ownership again. "With the money from the rent, I'm sure we can get along all right."

Phil did not answer. That issue was settled. He folded his front page to an article by Bryan on coalition of Democrat and Populist parties. As he read it he saw again the huge shoulders and flashing eyes, and the crowd of upturned faces.

Chapter 15

"The humblest citizen in all the land, when clad in the armor of righteousness, is stronger than all the hosts of error. I come in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity. . . .

"We have begged . . . and now we defy you. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!"

Three weeks after the Abilene rally, Bryan's national convention thunder from Chicago came like a bugle call that set a whole seething region ready to march. Men read and re-read the address, pounded school benches as they shouted its paramount issues at Granges.

Even the Palmers could swing to a straight Populist ticket, for there was no mention of Phil's name as candidate for office. Unconvinced and inquisitive, Arch stopped in at Wyatt's hardware the day after the local caucus and dawdled apart from other clerks until his son-in-law was free to wait on him. Phil set the tray of screwdrivers he asked to see before him on the counter.

"I heard you told Dutch Haeckel you might be quittin' your job." Palmer picked out a tool and checked the business edge. "That right?"

"Yes," Phil said. "This is my last week."

"I reckon it's back to the farm for you?" Arch sighted along the bar of the instrument in his hand and selected another. "I suppose you have a little left to buy tools to start over."

"I'll manage." Phil watched him turn both screwdrivers over to compare the prices on the handles and let him wait.

Arch laid them back down, took up a third and then a fourth. "This one looks like good iron," he said at last.

"All our products are quality," Phil told him.

"Wal, I guess you can wrap it up."

Phil dropped it handle first into a paper sack, twisting shut the end. Punctiliously he counted out the change from the cash drawer. "I'm sure you'll be satisfied. Thank you, and come again." He stood and watched his father-in-law leave the store. I'd like to see your face when you read today's *Chronicle*, he thought.

Phil bought an early copy of the paper as soon as the store closed and hurried home ahead of the newsboy's delivery, for he had not confided in Maggie. He went straight into the kitchen where she was peeling potatoes and held the announcement before her. "You never expected anything like that, I'll bet. I'm running the campaign for the next Governor! George Foster got me the job of manager."

The column heading was bold and black, and in Maggie's hand the paring knife ceased to function as she stared at the print. She sat very still, holding the pan in her lap unconsciously against tipping, her thoughts struggling in new dismay before the ring in his voice.

Electra and Clarence had stopped playing in the yard to follow him inside, and the girl's voice came from the doorway. "Are you really going to see the Governor, Pa?"

"See him? I'll be right with him! What do you think of that!"

"G-g-gosh!" said Clarence, his eyes wider from bewilderment of his sister's shining ones.

"It's fine for you, Phillip, isn't it?" Maggie said, trying to speak ahead of Electra what he would want them to say.

"It's fine for all of us. It means a good job after elections." He took the paper from before her and handed it with a flourish to Electra. "Read it, and see what it says about your dad!" He turned back to Maggie. "It'll be something for your dad to think about also. He was in the store this afternoon nosing around, thought I'd lost clear out in politics and gone broke besides."

"Will you be making speeches again?"

"Some, but mostly I'll be going around the state planning rallies. We'll nominate Leedy, and he's sure to win; but we're after control of the whole legislature." He nodded for her to listen to Electra reading with emphasis to Clarence. "A better choice could not have been made. Mr. Garwood is known throughout the party for his loyalty, energy, and resourcefulness."

"Yes, they're all excited," Maggie said.

"Well, it takes a man with ability to do the scheming. We need to keep radical planks like woman suffrage out of our platform. Too much reform all at once will make the party look dangerous nationally."

Maggie stared down at the potatoes in her lap, bewildered at his fire and also frightened by the prospects of political responsibilities for herself. "I wouldn't know who to vote for anyway."

Phil caught up her statement. "By God, that's the most sensible argument, I've heard!" He took a quick turn about the kitchen, knuckles of one hand buried in the palm of the other, and stopped before her. "You hit the nail on the head for all the preaching of the duty of citizens to go to the polls. Unless they've studied the issues, they'd better stay home!"

"How soon will you be going away?" Maggie asked.

"Next week. Saturday will be my last day at the store. I'll have all travel expenses paid, so we won't be out much. You'll have to look after the children."

"Maybe I could stay with the folks and save paying rent."

"No, your dad would jump at the chance to tell me to take care of my own family."

Maggie took up her peeling again. "I get awfully tired sitting here inside," she murmured. "If I just had more work to do."

Phil looked down at her, touched by the patience in her voice. "Do you get pretty lonesome?"

She nodded. "Especially after school starts."

"That's the time you could get acquainted with other women, while the children are gone. Invite somebody in."

"I don't know anyone well enough. Ma and Pa almost never took me anywhere."

"I'll tell you what," Phil said. "We can find a place on the outskirts of town with space to keep a cow and chickens if it's really more work you want—but I'd rather see you rest."

"Oh, I do, Phillip. I'd be so much happier!"

"All right," he said, "if you think you'll feel more at home. There'll be time enough to get us moved and straightened around."

Phil and Andy went to the State Convention together. Into the Populist platform went the planks for free silver, graduated income taxes, state aid to education, compulsory grade school attendance, government ownership of railroads, abandonment of the lame duck session of Congress, and—to Phil's misgivings—also woman suffrage. He rose on the floor to speak against it and tried to express Maggie's bewilderment on issues as typical of wives, but was interrupted by Susan Anthony's delegation of matrons arising as a group with reddened faces and flashing eyes. "Ever since Eve, woman has been waiting to take her just place in this world, and we will not wait longer!" shouted their spokesman. Her voice shrilled higher with each sentence and ended on the threat to walk out of the convention and attack everything Populistic from the home front.

There was humorous ducking of male heads around the women. Into faces farther removed came expressions of condescension and in yet others that look of distaste of a man holding his tongue to avoid domestic strife. Phil retreated gracefully. "I appreciate your position, sister," he said. "I am not against suffrage personally, and I withdraw my suggestion."

After the convention Andy went to his home district to campaign. When he visited party headquarters in Abilene weeks later, Phil was not in the hotel though Andy had arrived on the midnight train. Across the deserted street headquarters building with posters and banners was dark except for one room. Andy found Phil alone there bent over a spread sheaf of papers, sight shielded from the glaring desk bulb by a green eye shade. At Andy's tap on the door casing he looked up and at once rose in welcome. "You're back when I needed you!"

In first glance as Andy entered he noted the difference from the central office of Lewelling's campaign. There was but one desk in the room, its basket of papers neatly stacked and the floor uncluttered. The familiar odor of tobacco smoke was mixed with the smell of fresh, strong coffee instead of whiskey. Phil poured Andy a cup and urged him into a chair, sat

down with him and stretched in evident physical relief. Then he pointed to the big state wall map dotted with red and blue pins and a few yellow ones.

"That looks like a battle map," Andy said.

Phil grinned and retorted: "We're at war." He rose again quickly, nervously, and stepped over beside the map. "The reds are ours, the blue theirs; and where you see them together we'll make a finish fight. The yellows are Democrat strongholds. I want you to go over the whole campaign with me and see what mistakes I've made."

"Tonight?"

"We'll start tonight. You're the only one I can trust, and I need to publish Leedy's travel itinerary." Phil pushed up his shade, and Andy saw that his eyes were tired red and shadowed but intensely bright. "We have the best platform a party ever had, if we can put it over."

"We'll win," Andy quietly reassured him. "It was close last election and new people are flocking to us this time."

"Among the rank and file that's all right," Phil said, "but I don't like the scramble of Republican big-wigs to get under our tent. If they'll sell out to us, they'll sell out again against us. I ordered your old friend, Dave Meyerhoff, out of here yesterday."

Andy whistled.

"He'd already seen Leedy and been told we'd deal and now Leedy's sore at me. He's too damned eager to take in recruits. Do you know what Meyerhoff asked? To name the assistant attorney general!"

"By God, they must be scared! If you've kicked Big Dave in the seat, we'll need the National Guard for Leedy when he speaks in Topeka."

"He isn't going to speak there. I have a better plan for Topeka." Phil halted as if interrupting himself, facial lines of responsibility deepening. "I'll have to make deals, and I'm too new to know who I can trust."

"I've been in it a while, and I still don't either," Andy told him. "That's what makes it exciting, the chances you take."

"I'm taking no more than I can help," Phil said. He turned and prepared to make more coffee.

"I'll write a list tomorrow of the few I know to be reliable and get them down here," Andy said. For a couple of moments he watched Phil hunched forward over his papers—penciling in and penciling out again, staring at times at what he had written. On the side of his face the muscles twitched occasionally—reminding Andy of Governor Lewelling's nervous exhaustion at close of the legislative session, after numerous double-crosses had led him to doubt everybody and take the whole load of work and decisions upon himself. His was the oldest story of failure in politics—

assumption of too much personal responsibility. Only those survived who could organize and delegate duties successfully.

Andy carried the steaming pot and his own cup over to the desk, and Phil looked up with papers still in his hands as fresh coffee was poured. "The outlines for Leedy's speeches on his tour. It's damned interesting, you know," he said, laying down the sheets and leaning back to sip. "Like a game of chess, only you're playing both sides, trying to beat yourself and at the same time win."

Andy stepped to the wall map. "I'll be your opposition." He circled an area with a finger tip. "Among these Old World colonies where women are kept home, if you mentioned suffrage I'd jump on you with spurs."

"Good, we'll soft-pedal it there," cried Phil, instantly making notation. He looked up from his pencil with a glimmer behind a grin in his eyes. "What would you do in that southeast coal and lead region when we parade the miners with our band playing *The Ninety and Nine*?"

Andy hummed the line about hunger and cold and laughed. "If I were an old guard, capitalistic Republican, I'd make it a point to stay off the streets. You'll be charged with Socialism."

"We won't reply to general accusations," Phil said. "We're going to keep folks mad as hell about their grain they see rotting while Eastern families starve, and let the opposition try to explain economic cycles. We're going to keep them reminded of the things they could buy with silver dollars, and let the middlemen tell them why binders and flour went up while wheat went down and how the gold standard is necessary for international trade." He paused, for an instant staring distastefully at the wall map, but went on very deliberately. "It's the way to win. Stir people to emotional heat of a religious crusade. Bryan has shown us that, and we'll have them hotter than fire before this is over. As long as we're right attacking wrong, we won't need to defend ourselves. That's why I want everything organized down to Leedy's last speech before we begin. Once we start, we must not stop."

Andy nodded. "The best defense is a continuous offense!" He felt his mind growing keen and dragged a chair up to the desk opposite Phil where they could face one another, each with pencil and note paper at hand. "Let's go," he said.

They stimulated each other mutually with vicious attacks, and on the same issues collaborated with supporting suggestions. The horizon was gray, outlining store roofs across the street, when they ceased work; and Andy, in spite of an ache for sleep in his back and shoulders, had never known himself so mentally alert.

"We sure got a lot done," he said, with a good pride of accomplishment in both voice and face, "and it's the first time I ever had so much fun doing it."

Phil looked at him between heavy, red-lidded eyes in understanding. "The law students used to get together nights back East, usually with beer." He smiled slowly almost tenderly in reminiscence, then shook himself back to the business at hand. "Can you be here for a while? I don't make headway enough alone."

"I'll stay as long as you need me," Andy told him. He rose, ready for his hotel bed, and Phil told of cancelling his own suite for party economy. "I had a cot with blankets brought to the office. Campaign funds is our biggest problem. I wish we had money enough honestly contributed that I wouldn't need to allow any compromises at all."

Andy marked a note of despondency returning to Phil's voice and expression. He felt that in part it arose from wretched weariness evident in the slump of Phil's shoulders now that he had relaxed. "You should have kept yourself a better place to rest."

"It saved me one promise of patronage," Phil said.

To Andy such a single act was insignificant. He toyed with a cigarette he had rolled instead of lighting it, thinking again of Lewelling overburdened yet concerning himself with minor details. As if from inspiration Andy saw such preoccupation as an escape from major decisions into the satisfaction of small concrete results. Inspired by his insight and concerned for Phil, he spoke bluntly. "There is no place in politics for personal sacrifices to make yourself feel righteous." The words sounded cruel as he heard them uttered, but to his surprise they did not anger Phil. He stared at the floor, sucking at a corner of his mustache, and at length smiled. "You can kill yourself trying to do a whole campaign." Andy spoke to soften his previous remark, wondering how anyone pessimistic about people could yet work so hard in their behalf.

Andy spent two weeks with Phil and did not see him again until elections. While Phil remained at headquarters, Andy traveled and spoke, and saw first hand the results of their almost day and night planning with the party members he had called to Abilene. There was the tightening of the secret meetings of the Granges with vows on quotas for perishable produce and boycotts against merchants.

Wherever Andy spoke precinct committeemen had the town plastered with posters; and into the towns came invading rural voters. Ready band wagons with floats and banners paraded in daytime to tunes of "The Hayseeds Are Coming" and "Molly and the Baby." Of nights it was torchlight

processions that lengthened until they took over streets and became great crowds in the parks about lantern-lit platforms. Stooped, obstinate looking men with muscles which bulged under patched overalls and shirts, and their families, too. Wives and sons and grown daughters with sun-blackened faces and hands knotty from field work.

When the Republicans staged their Capital City homecoming with band-led retinue of shining carriages carrying the whole state ticket, a sagging wagon turned out of an alley to tail the parade down Kansas Avenue. It was drawn by a sway-back mule hitched between broken shafts. Leedy in straw hat and suspender jeans sat hunched on the dashboard holding the lines. Above him was stretched the Populist banner with the caption: "We can't afford a carriage."

Andy walked with the grim men convoying the vehicle armed with hoe handles. Ready stationed party men along the route began hurraing and shouting slogans, and before the wagon had proceeded a block Andy knew that the maneuver had won the crowd as even non-Populist spectators began to laugh and cheer. If Meyerhoff tries rough stuff this time, he'll be mobbed by his own townsmen, thought Andy jubilantly. I wish Phil could see this stunt of his working out. I'll tell him for sure when we get home.

Yet when Phil returned to Plainsboro on the eve before election to vote, Andy was waiting for the train in a rage that had blotted out recollection of the Topeka coup. He dragged Phil beyond earshot of the station without even a welcome. "You know how hard we worked to keep the party free of traitors," Andy burst out. "You warned and warned against nominating old line Republicans that switched over! Here at home I tried to make a special case against taking Hank Loubet in for commissioner. Well, I trailed the bastard this afternoon to a Republican rally at West Bend!"

"How did you get wise to him?"

"Oscar Karns tipped me off. He's been betting on Democrat John Freeman right and left against Loubet—getting odds of ten to one."

"We can beat Henri yet by swinging our votes to John," Phil said.

"That's what Oscar says. But how? You don't dare telephone people. Hank would hear us and call around himself denying it."

Phil nodded. "Look. You go home and saddle two horses and bring them in. My old nags aren't fit for hard riding." His shoulders sagged at thought of the long night on horseback. Tensions these last days had held him to a keen edge above exhaustion until the moment he had finished and relaxed completely on starting home. He stiffened himself again, however, and passed a hand tightly pressed over his eyes. "Jesus,

I'm tired—but this can't wait. I'll take the hack to my place to save time and try to grab off a nap before you get back."

"I'll cover the north section of the district," Andy said. "It's the biggest."

They rode till dawn, and the polls opened with precinct captains on duty at the various schoolhouses. They kept guard on doorways just beyond the illegal radius for electioneering and called every Populist aside as he arrived. Too late to nominate a new candidate of their own, they thus threw support to Freeman.

"I don't know who'll be most surprised, John or Henri," Andy said. "There aren't a dozen standpat Democrats to a township."

"John will make a good commissioner," Phil said. "Nobody will get special favors from him."

Andy and Phil took Henri with his fresh box of election cigars downtown between them arm in arm to the evening crowd watching the early returns. Henri stared at the scoreboard, blinked his black eyes, and stared again. John Freeman, the sole Democrat to rate county listing, had a starting count of more votes than any other office-seeker on the tally.

"Why—what's happening here?"

Andy slapped him heartily on the back. "You tried to sit between two chairs, my friend, and you fell your ass on the floor!"

Henri whirled away from Andy, his dark complexion suddenly splotted in white and red. Half choking with rage and stuttering, he turned on Phil. "You—you engineered this—you—you—"

"I'd like to take credit, but I only helped," Phil told him.

Andy turned also, convulsed in laughter; but at sight of Henri trembling with clenched fists, he sobered and thrust out his chin. He stepped over and planted his chest almost against the Frenchman's. "I caught you, you damned double-crosser!"

Henri backed hastily, and Andy followed. "Get on home to Ez Karns and your Republican pals. You ain't wanted here." With men gathering behind Andy and applauding, he backed Henri down the sidewalk until the latter turned and ran.

All night groups of people waited in the streets for latest figures, but Phil took Andy home with him to catch up on sleep. When they went downtown again next morning, county victory was assured.

"We'll at least get rid of that eyesore," Phil said of the decrepit courthouse in the park square where they joined the crowd.

The tally board on the balcony outside the country clerk's office showed the Populists in a state lead. While Phil and Andy checked it the clerk came out with new gains just telephoned from the *Chronicle*. Those

watching cheered, but the mass did not gather until afternoon when wagons loaded with families poured into town as on circus day. Then Phil went home to fetch Maggie.

"You've simply got to come and see. It'll be the biggest celebration ever!" he told her. "And pack sandwiches for the picnic this evening." They left a note for the children to come after school and drove as far as they could down the streets already jamming in every direction from the park.

When he got to the square, Phil left Maggie to sit on a bench with the women and took Shannon by the hand through the throng to rejoin Andy, who had never left the tally board.

"We're stretching our lead," Andy said. "It's about sure now for everybody except maybe Leedy. We're still waiting to hear from Kansas City and Wichita." He dropped his cigarette, stepped on it and rolled a fresh one. "I'm beginning to get scared for Leedy." While he dug for a match there was a commotion before the balcony door above, and the county clerk stepped forth almost dancing.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Republican headquarters at Topeka have conceded the entire Populist ticket!"

Caps and cheers went up together. Andy crushed the unlighted cigarette as he waved his fists before he seized Phil's shoulders and hugged him. "We did it! We're in!"

Men held each other's arms and circled in leaping dances. Others whose vehicles were near ran to hold their horses unhitched and tied to the wheels before they began rearing and snorting to the racket. Already clangor of cowbells had broken out and the banging of tin pans and washtubs being beaten to junk.

Jostled and half trampled, little Shannon began to tug at his father's hand, frightened and ready to cry. Phil hoisted him to his shoulder, and pushing and thrusting for passage, headed off to put him into custody of his mother.

Maggie was sitting on the bench where they had left her, her fingers gripping the slats in apprehensive bewilderment. Phil planted the boy at her side and bent toward her, for the yelling and other noises were still rising and mixed now with the popping of firecrackers. "Didn't I tell you we'd do it!"

The first shattering blast of an anvil made Maggie jump. Then came another and another, violences from adjacent alleys which jarred the earth like cannon. Phil stooped still closer to her ear, shouting. "We've swept the state!"

Maggie's comprehension was still only of the immediate turmoil. "It'll be a wonder if somebody doesn't get killed here!" she said.

Phil laughed and shook his head, straightened up with a whoop of his own, and ran off into the crowd. He did not get back to Andy in time for them to join the raiding party who piled into a wagon and headed to the lumberyard for planks for picnic tables. "I told them we'd clear a space while they were gone," Andy said.

The progressing commotion of the vehicle in passage down the crowded street had hardly turned the corner when the same stir began again from the opposite direction. Around that corner a dray appeared, the driver down and leading his team slowly to avoid bumping anyone. Behind him drunk and swaying on top a load of beer kegs upended and ready tapped rode big, moon-faced Oscar Karns.

"HOORAY FOR THE GODDAM DEMOCRAT!" he shouted as the dray turned into the square, and then again as it stopped, louder than ever and waving his hat. "It's all free. Line up, men, and grab a cup. We don't shut a spigot till it's dry!"

For a moment Andy's eyes and mouth stood wide open. "Why that son-of-a-bitch!"

"You said he was getting odds of ten to one," Phil said.

Suddenly they both burst into laughter.

"We may as well go drink his beer," Andy said. "We practically bought it for him." Together they hurried off to join the line already forming for the handout.

The driver unhitched and led away his team. When the planks arrived they were placed in pairs on packing boxes for long tables on either side of the dray. There food baskets brought by the wives were opened to everyone along with stacks of ham and cheese sandwiches donated by the beer dealer. Through all activity, Oscar Karns stuck to his post as spigot operator, rolling each emptied keg from the back end of the dray and promptly tipping another into place. His narrow gray eyes, the only thing about his heavy face resembling his father, grew blurred, but they stayed alive; and he continued able to manage with one hand, the other holding always his own cup.

"I don't know how the hell that man does it," Andy said to Phil. "Even on whiskey he never passes out. He's the damnedest guy to stagger, but he never falls."

As attention turned to the picnic lunch, noises gradually died. Leaping bonfires danced red against the chill November evening as it came on, and only an occasional whoop rose from some spontaneous celebrant about the grounds. Men stood up to the pleasant flames or sat in groups on the

plank tables and talked of good times now at hand. Oftener and oftener with darkness they called each other aside among the wagons for something more warming than Oscar's beer. It was their wives who finally coaxed them into embarking for home and who drove the teams, with the children watching to keep the men from toppling out under the wheels.

Phil had to be led to his carriage and helped into the seat. Electra and Clarence took care of the team that night while Maggie coaxed him into the house and put him to bed. She stood and looked down at him before leaving the room to see to the children. His mouth was lax under his mustache. He still had a chew of tobacco, and a drool of juice mixed with saliva ran from the corner of his mouth down upon the pillow. Maggie removed the quid with her finger and wiped his lips. She kept her own tightly compressed, but tears slipped down her cheeks.

Phil awoke next morning with a miserable headache and his throat and mouth burning. He sat up, slouching on the bed's edge, and tried to think. Slowly and hazily, events of the day before came back. He recalled trying some new drinks and after an extra effort remembered being hoisted into the carriage. From there he needed to drive his lagging memory no farther; his surmise supplied the rest. Should'a stuck to beer, he thought. Nobody ever gets very drunk on beer, once you have it running through you. She put me to bed!

There was a dent in the second pillow where Maggie had lain beside him. His face flamed. Slept there to keep me covered.

The sun was not high, but the family was up; he could hear them moving about the kitchen. The pitcher on the stand was full, and crispness of the night had lent an icy tang to the water. Phil took a big drink to relieve his nausea then filled the basin and plunged his face into it, slopping water over his neck, arms, and shoulders. For lack of a towel, he used the bed quilt to rub himself dry.

The family were at breakfast when he went downstairs. Maggie said nothing at all at his entrance. Clarence flashed a half-humorous look at his sister, who promptly turned her eyes to her plate.

Phil stood quietly at the head of the table for a moment before seating himself. "Children, you saw your father drunk last night, didn't you?"

Everyone fell very sober except little Shannon with his bright blue eyes happy to have Phil home. Shannon laughed loudly. Old enough to have noticed without grasping significances, he had thought his daddy's antics very funny.

Phil smiled faintly. "You will never see him drunk again."

After breakfast he hurried to town for final news on the Presidential race and came home silent over the defeat of Bryan and the great hopes he had raised. It means we'll go on paying high freight rates, he thought gloomily, and no free silver, no income taxes on the rich. I tried to tell them we were after too much reform all at once. It was a bigger bite than the nation could swallow.

That evening after supper Phil sat down with a bundle of newspapers, national as well as local; but he found himself glancing up from time to time, pleasantly unable to get absorbed in his reading. Maggie had come into the living room and was knitting mittens for the boys. There was Clarence at the table, grimly involved with a stubborn arithmetic problem. He was not quick in books like Electra or as Shannon promised to be, yet too proud to ask help except occasionally from his sister. Phil felt a stir of respect for that pride and wished the boy would turn to him. Through the thoughts he listened to Electra teaching Shannon to read but without looking at her, afraid of the wave of nostalgia her delicate features could bring in quiet moments. At length he stirred deeper into his seat, the leather chair in which he had read through so many evenings, and let his head rest back closing his eyes. The room was warm with comfort and relaxation he had not known for weeks, and he dozed until time for the children to be put to bed. Afterwards he talked with Maggie alone.

"Leedy has wired me to come to the conference at LeRoy. I'll have a choice of several positions. I haven't decided, but I'm thinking of taking the chairmanship of the Board of Education. It pays well, but we'd have to move to Topeka—" A shadow passed over his wife's patient face, and after pausing he went on. "I wish we liked the same things more. It would be much easier for both of us. I've wished I could like farming as you do, but I was never cut out for that. I'd have quit the first year of the drouth when I saw that land would be a long time rising, if I hadn't felt responsible to you and the children. I fought it as long as I could."

Chapter 16

Phil returned from LeRoy and left again with Andy in mid-December for the capital and Leedy's inauguration, still without making a decision.

The two men arrived in Topeka late on a Saturday evening and put up at Hotel Throop, Democrat headquarters during the campaign. Andy, accustomed to the weekend deadness of that city from his two years there brought out a bottle of whiskey from his suitcase on reaching their room. "Want a hot toddy?"

"I think not," Phil said.

Andy sat on the edge of the bed in his undershirt and sipped his drink. He was aware of the conflict in Phil's mind and waited for him to bring it up if he chose. He watched Phil mechanically unpack his suitcase and stare at the empty container before closing it. He took it to the closet and stood looking at his hat and overcoat hanging there. "I'm not ready for sleep. Would it disturb you when I came in if I went for a stroll?"

"Not a chance as dead as I feel," Andy said. He raised his glass a little. "Got a cold to break up."

Phil laughed. "It's an awful light one for as strong as you made that." They looked at each other in the friendly accord of two men who understood one another's moods.

"It'll be there on the dresser if you want a nightcap when you come back," Andy said.

Phil went downstairs and outside. He halted on the hotel steps and looked east along the stretch of street scattered with horse cars and cabs and still a few people moving on sidewalks under the white unflickering light of the new electric bulbs. It was Phil's first night for a long while in a sizable city, and he was drawn at once by urban surroundings into thoughts of a new beginning for himself if he chose it. He walked aimlessly except once when he turned right to circle the Capitol grounds, and when he came back to Kansas Avenue his face was sunk deep into his coat. Maggie's face, silent and unhappy, had kept arising before him to interfere with every plan. A man must not let wife and family destroy a career, Phil told himself. A man lived but once, and was meant to do the work he dreamed of. It didn't matter what work. If he believed in it, would he not make them all proud—if he stuck to it long enough? Phil halted with a mental start at realizing he had put the thought as a question, and that perhaps he was blaming Maggie for hesitancy within himself. He did not challenge the principles behind reforms in the party platform, but he admitted a lack of Andy's young confidence. Already factional bickering had begun. It might necessitate compromise legislation with small practical results. Failing, Andy would say as he had after Lewelling: "Next time." But past forty time became crucial, and persistence alone began to look like folly. Phil started walking again, frowning at the paving stones. Could a man persist successfully, feeling doubts?

Chilled and gloomy, he returned to his hotel. It was past mid-night, and the lobby deserted save for a solitary figure in one corner. Phil looked casually toward him as he waited for the elevator, and his heart gave a bound. There remote from observation in a chair scarcely large enough to accommodate his frame, his black alpaca coat dingy, his big head lolling, his eyes closed—sat William Jennings Bryan.

Upstairs, Phil bent over Andy, shook him and dragged at his shoulders. "Wake up." Determinedly he pulled him to sitting posture. "Bryan is downstairs."

Andy awakened enough to stare grumpily while still clinging to his blankets. "What of it? He's beat."

"He's left alone there. You can't keep a man like him down. He'll make a comeback."

He made Andy get up and dress, wash in ice water for freshening. "He's a teetotaler. Take a mint and keep a cigar going," Phil said.

When Phil and Andy entered the lobby, Bryan had left the corner and was sitting at a writing desk with his campaign-frayed briefcase open beside him. He looked up and turned in his chair at their approach, stood up and held out his hand to Andy. "Congratulations on your re-election Mr. York. It is a pleasure to see you again and to thank you for enabling me to carry your state."

Andy introduced Phil as Leedy's campaign manager. Bryan's clasp and gaze lingered momentarily with Phil at their exchange of Masonic grips. "My congratulations to you also, Mr. Garwood, on your sweeping victory. Perhaps you should have been *my* campaign manager." He paused and suddenly he chuckled. "Your coup here in the city of Leedy with his mule and wagon was excellent. Excellent!"

Phil felt himself flushing. "I doubt that much of our state strategy could have been applied nationally. The national campaign helped us much more state-wise than we helped it."

"Yes," said Andy quickly. "If all Populists had supported the Democrat party nationwide as they did their own locally, the results would have been very different."

Bryan smiled. "The election is past history," he said clearly in his deep, rich voice, "but the issues are still before us." Bryan motioned to a cluster of wicker chairs. He seated himself with them almost eagerly, and Phil knew their appearance had not been an intrusion, but timely. Bryan seemed as familiar with the Kansas Populist platform as a native of the state when he questioned Andy, as a legislator, on how much of the program would be enacted.

"We should get everything this term with both houses clearly ours," Andy assured him, "except items such as free silver and government ownership of railroads which can come only through Federal action."

Bryan nodded in satisfaction. "A state can do much to demonstrate to the nation," he said. "Reform like charity best begins at home." Andy's role as representative was clear, and he turned in curiosity to

Phil, who had sat silent before Andy's optimism. "Will you be directing the legislative program as you did the campaign?"

Phil shook his head.

"He has been offered the chairmanship of the Board of Education," Andy announced.

"What a wonderful opportunity with your party pledged to greater state aid to colleges!" cried Bryan. "You will be working at the grassroots of reform with cumulative effects for years to come. It is the level the office seeker too often has neither time nor patience to cultivate. Education for the measures we now deem desirable should have begun twenty years ago. I do not mean political indoctrination by our schools, God forbid, but secondary and higher learning economically available to everyone with intelligence to grasp and consider all views. Even good reforms cannot be impressed upon a democratic state without demagoguery. Under government by and for the people, responsibilities of representatives and the represented are reciprocal."

Phil nodded to the deep, luminous eyes, recognizing clearly what he had sensed from their prompt welcome, that Bryan disappointed, but energetic in defeat, felt need of a receptive audience. And strangely, listening seemed an important privilege.

"Many good things await the common people's wise understanding of their strength," Bryan continued. "Your Populist uprising sprang from the same fundamental rights as the cry of labor unions for assurances of food and clothing. Opposition of the wealthy and powerful is less to those items as such than to a precedent. They fear the workers because they see them beginning to look beyond bare necessities to comforts and security of owning dwellings and stable jobs, to good schools, to hospitals and doctors for their sick, clean parks where families and healthy children play. Just as you folks see a windmill and a carriage for every homestead, and a graded road to the nearest town. But the people are still afraid really to look. I see the world's finest transportation system of railroads, highways, and canals bringing abundant pure food at low prices to our towns and cities. I see ocean ships traveling the St. Lawrence to load and unload goods all the way through our Great Lakes."

Bryan bent forward, his gaze on Phil and Andy passing through them and walls. Phil saw Andy leaning also with features lighted as at the Abilene rally, and it seemed out of place to raise his own lingering doubts.

"The isolation in which you rural folks live is unjustified," Bryan continued. "Few of you even have telephones—"

"We do," Andy interrupted. Excitedly he sketched the fight with the Gresham Corporation, and Bryan in his turn listened, nodding.

"Your cooperative is an example of action the powerfully wealthy fear, but the time will come when big corporations' abuse of their obligations to the public will not be tolerated by your government." From directly answering Andy, Bryan returned his gaze to speak also to Phil. "We bring our panics upon ourselves simply by allowing them. When democratic education has given enough people vision enough, then preventive legislation will follow as a matter of course. My opposition has accused me as a dreamer and radical for proposing progressive measures actually upon us." For an instant Bryan's eyes heated toward indignation then mellowed again. "Why, when I *do* let myself dream, the future staggers me." He raised and parted his hands in an encompassing gesture to all sides, and his voice while it did not rise in volume yet sounded as if he were suddenly addressing a multitude. "Think of all our God-given resources—iron, coal beds, oil fields, forests, waterpower, fertile acres! God's own dream of freedom and equality for man handed down for a Constitution to inspire us! Such a legacy must not be corrupted by scheming for profits and power. That, in democracy, is the forbidden fruit." Bryan's words rolled softly and his eyes shone. Who dare say we could not afford comforts and plenty for all—warm houses, employment, food storage against famines? Fear and want were incompatible with Christianity in the human heart. They could be driven from every home in the land for half the billions spent on the War with the South. Why fear to exert ourselves for peacetime improvements? Who could deny the wisdom of as much effort in peace as in war? "This is the greatest nation on earth!" Bryan sank a huge fist into his other equally massive palm. "Now that the war has proved us united forever too strong for foreign attack, America has only to exert herself to become the model in harmony, justice, and living standards to all the world."

For a while he spoke quietly of the pioneering common man—his industry, his earthy humor, his sturdy good sense. "It is only when his patience has become justifiably exhausted that he can be turned to violence." He told of his own months and months of waiting in his office after graduating with honors in law before his first client appeared. "That was late in the wake of the Panic of 1873. A man can learn a great lesson in patience and perseverance from early years of discouragement." Bryan paused and looked long and steadily at Phil, who knew the moment he became cognizant of the silence and the gaze, that Bryan was reading the expression of brooding recollection which listening brought into his face. "I daresay you believe there can be too much discouragement," he heard Bryan say to him, and felt himself nod without having willed the gesture. "And so there can be," said Bryan firmly. "I suppose if I

had begun practice in the depth of the despairs of the 1893 Panic, I might have led Coxey's army myself. That is why there must be progress. The only alternative is anarchy."

The progressive leader was both pioneer and explorer, he continued, and as he spoke on and on the street outside the window changed toward the gray of winter dawn until at length Bryan noticed and halted abruptly.

"Why, I should not have taken a hotel room," he said smiling. "I haven't used it. And I thought of ordering coffee when first we sat down, but it slipped my mind. Come, we shall have an extra cup for breakfast."

Outside on the still deserted sidewalk enroute to an all-night restaurant, Bryan relapsed once and briefly into his former mood. "If I were truly a visionary," he said almost poignantly, "I would not have spoken of the things I did. I would have sought to visualize what our great grandchildren would see. Electrical marvels and horseless carriages speeding everywhere. With God willing it, maybe men riding up there?" He waved to the sky, breathing deeply of its cold, fresh air.

Phil and Andy, hurrying their steps to match his vigorous strides, looked together at the profile of Bryan's face. Phil felt that, unlike Andy, he had not been swept away. He had listened to things he wished to believe and wanted to hear, but when one was aware of the wishing and wanting he could not accept without question. Yet he knew that he had seen into the heart of a great man, and he felt flattered that Bryan had opened it so completely.

After breakfast when they shook hands in parting in the hotel lobby, Andy stood beside the elevator before entering to watch Bryan all the way down the hall to his first floor room. "Why does a man like him object to being called a dreamer?" he asked simply. "If he can make one one-hundredth part of what he sees come true, it has been worthwhile."

Phil nodded, not speaking. He knew that now he would accept the chairmanship of the Board of Education, and that day wrote Maggie that he would send for her and the children in the spring when the weather was warmer.

Chapter 17

For Maggie's arrival Phil rented a modern apartment, ready for occupancy from laundered curtains to the last specks of dust wiped from varnished floors. He gave her the key at the door and told her to unlock it for herself and the children ahead of him.

The door opened into the living room, and Maggie halted in the entrance, blocking it for the rest of them. The fat, plush sofa and arm chairs, the thick center rug, immaculate walls and ceiling hung with gleaming chandelier with electric bulbs represented luxury foreign to all she had known.

"Now you know why I had you store our furniture," she heard Phil say.

After a long moment Maggie spoke half hesitantly. "I—I'm having one piece sent, your leather reading chair."

"Fine," said Phil. "I can always find a place for that." As Maggie took a step forward he added, "Electra's room opens off to the right, and the boys have their own on the left." Shannon charged past his mother at the news, and headed for the door Phil had indicated. When he left the rug and his hard-soled shoes encountered the polished floor, his feet shot from under him and he slid on his chubby bottom all the way to the wall. He scrambled up astounded and tested the slick surface with his toe. "Wheel!" he whooped, prepared to skate, and Clarence moved to join him.

"No, no!" Maggie ordered. She looked aghast at the two streaks Shannon's heels had left in the varnish.

Phil only laughed. "There'll be lots of marks before long." He showed her how to open and close the steam radiators and led the way into the kitchen. Electra exclaimed at sight of the white enameled gas stove and sink. "Hot water whenever you want it," Phil said, turning one of the spigots. He looked at Maggie and she smiled, but it was a bewildered smile, marred by homesickness already visible in her face which gave him a sudden feeling of let-down. Phil had intended to spend the family's day of arrival with them, but after they had inspected all of the apartment he announced he would go to the office. Alone with Maggie in their room he embraced her, an act they had refrained from in public in the train station, and he placed her hands one on top the other and pressed them between his as he released her. "I haven't bought a thing, so you and Electra will have to shop." He took a pad of bills from his wallet and laid them still folded on the dresser before he left.

Phil had had plenty of work to keep him busy before his family joined him. He had drawn up his whole program for state aid to education before the legislature convened, and Andy had thrust it through with a huge appropriation as the first bill under the Populists' banner campaign slogan: "Borrow and Build."

Inspired by Bryan's remark on higher learning economically available to all, Phil chose the financially starved Agricultural College for his

project, and came into conflict with new Populist president Gillian's opinions on utility education. Before Phil could get him stopped, Gillian had banned arts degrees for the practical sounding Bachelor of Science. He damned sculpture, painting, and philosophy and pushed music and literature into the background. The museum, nurtured by predecessors, was junked, and the beautiful specimens dumped over the river bank to make immediate space for more laboratories in crop experimentation.

Maggie, unhappy and unable to adjust to a new life, was an added problem; but as one suggestion after another by Phil failed for her, he himself adjusted instead. He found suitable compromise in dividing time between job and family, determined to do justice to both. Maggie refrained from complaining. The children, at least, were happy and Electra delighted with her big high school. His satisfaction in watching them and the apartment's quiet, cleanliness and good food provided a needed daily respite.

Novelty of victory and reform wore off after legislative adjournment, and agrarian rugged individualism reasserted itself, so endangering party unity that Phil wrote in irony to Foster: "Coronado should have left some Spanish colonies for the people to persecute for Cuba, while our Administration gets its work done." Foster sent Andy to discuss the growing discord.

Phil entered his office to find his cousin sitting in front of his desk with heels propped between two baskets of reports and letters. Andy tipped a new derby half way over his eyes, and his cigar exaggeratedly upwards. "Do I look professional enough?"

"Too damn much," Phil said. "You better stick to a farmer's pipe and throw that hat away."

Andy laughed. "I won it on an election bet." He removed and began twirling the derby.

"It's a nice campaign souvenir for your closet," Phil said. He took his own chair, picked up a pipe and emptied the bowl against his palm into the wastebasket. "Well, what is it? You've come to argue. You have that look on your face." He settled back to enjoy the exchange.

"You mentioned campaigns, and Foster is getting worried about the next one," Andy said, still twirling. "He has five thousand signatures on petitions against your Agricultural College program from University faculty and alumni who want a bigger share of state money."

"That came from Gillian's bragging," Phil said. "If he had kept his mouth shut, they wouldn't have known down at the University. Well, he wasn't my choice, and he isn't fit to be a college president."

"He worked hard for Leedy, and the Governor had to make concessions," Andy said.

"Then tell Leedy to shut him up on calling the University a 'finishing school for swanks' and how much more money he's getting for *his* college."

"I thought you and Gillian were a team," Andy said.

"We haven't actually tangled yet," said Phil. For a moment an iron-like glint showed behind his eyes. "I've let him have free hand on building contracts to get new halls and equipment fast. But I'm damned if I'll see him play politics for teachers to use them."

"All right, you can fight that out between yourselves." Andy brought his feet down to the floor and sat up, tossing aside his hat. "But right now what about all those petitions? Jesus, I wouldn't have believed the University had so many alumni, and all after your scalp."

"I've known all along that if I did my job I wouldn't be reappointed," Phil said. "Andy, I'm going to let you in on something not even Foster knows. I had a private understanding with Leedy on three things when I took this chairmanship: put the Agricultural College on its feet as a poor man's college, state aid to build new country school houses and high schools, and compulsory school attendance through the grades. Two of those were right in the Party platform."

"Uh huh, and the last one has started people grumbling everywhere. Making kids go to school takes them from the fields. Folks are saying it's state interference in their homes."

"It's good for the children," Phil said, "and the law is already passed. So is the state aid bill."

"Well, aid is one thing nobody is kicking on. They think what they get from the state is free." Andy leaned back, but his blue eyes searched Phil's dark ones. "Did it ever occur to you educators that we are tricking the people instead of teaching them?"

"Granted," Phil said. "They'll have to pay off the bonds in the end. But how else you going to do it? Taxpayers will damn sure not vote taxes *directly* on themselves. Look how long we tried for a new school house back in our own district and didn't get it. Now it will be built. The only thing left is to finish expanding the Agricultural College, and I will with next year's appropriation."

"No matter how the University folks feel about it?"

"They'll feel all right," Phil said. "That's another part of my agreement with the Governor. If criticism gets too strong, he's to denounce and fire me near the end to get people out of his hair. After he's re-elected, I'm to show up as director of the State Highway Commission

to ram through a road building program the same way. Two terms finish him off politically as Governor anyway, and the people have schools and roads."

"The trouble is it might finish off the party with him," Andy said.

"Not that soon. Folks will like good roads, and the party that gave them the roads. Look, Andy. The business cycle rises and falls, and when full prosperity gets here reform will look dangerous to the people. It is only because times got so bad that they rose up and put us in here, and we have to make the most of an opportunity. We planned to do things that are good. You and I know they are—even if they have to be crammed down a lot of throats."

"Bryan said the people should understand first."

"He made it sound fine by not going into complications. You can't educate in two or four years." Phil looked closely at Andy's troubled face. "I know it's what he called demagoguery of a sort. Don't you want it if it's good?"

"I'll take it," Andy said slowly. "But, damn, I wish there was some other way."

Phil laughed at him. "Just on principle?"

"Not altogether. It's something that could kick back—if times shouldn't get good."

"You're appropriations committee chairman. You raise enough money for us and they'll get better," Phil told him. "Think of all the men we're putting to work. They like their pay, and they'll vote for us."

Andy acknowledged agreement with a grin, and they chuckled together. "When I run for President," Andy said, "you'll be my campaign manager. We'll have the whole national treasury to back us in Washington!"

"Between now and then," Phil said, "you make a speaking tour covering every key Grange. It's a survey for agricultural improvement, you understand, and I'll arrange it at state expense. Don't forget to emphasize Populist prosperity. The business index shows the Panic easing. Foster says it hit bottom the late summer of our campaign with no direction to go except up—but we want the credit."

The enthusiasm with which Andy left Phil that early autumn changed with succeeding letters. "With times getting better people aren't so scared. They complain a lot, but they'd rather cuss the Spaniards than plan for next election. They wanted government help and now they call it government meddling. They sneer at the Department of Agriculture put into the Cabinet. Now that our Freight Subsidy Act has opened a grain and livestock market, folks think we should have gotten them high prices too!"

Andy spoke oftenest of Grange loyalty declining. "It's breaking down our corner on fruits and vegetables. Wherever I go I hear of those who sneak loads into town at night to sell over their quotas."

Shortly after Christmas he wrote of the Garden City Local adjourning ahead of his own lecture to hear Colonel Frederick Funston on Cuban Independence. "I went with them and had no idea until I heard him speak how cruel the Spanish were. If Funston had his way, he'd send the army to Havana instead of a battleship. The people were really stirred up, and I was too. They contributed five hundred dollars on the spot for Cuban homeless at Mantanzas, but you can't get members to pay their Grange dues. You've got to awaken our leaders in the capital, and bring Leedy out on a speaking tour before it's too late."

Phil was deep in President Gillian's report on college construction when the letter reached his desk. He re-read the last page and sat for a couple moments with it in his hand. Andy always tended to be excitable, he thought. He wrote back briefly: "It wouldn't do much good to stump the state this long ahead of voting time. What we said would be forgotten. If there is disruption ahead for the party, that's the more reason I should stay on my job and get as much done as possible. But I can't believe the government is crazy enough to get into war. People will forget Cuba as soon as newspaper propaganda lets up; and if we still have a hard core of organization functioning, they'll come flocking back."

While sealing his reply, Phil's mind had already returned to Gillian's elusive account of expenditures with costs rising far out of proportion to actual construction. Phil also had a letter from a courageous dean protesting delivery of inferior laboratory equipment. I'll feed Gillian rope for another month to make sure I've enough to hang him, thought Phil. He knew the President expected increased building funds plus salary appropriations for new teachers, Gillian's list of party protégés to be placed on the faculty. It would require all of Andy's drive to get only the salary appropriation past legislators recoiling from deeper indebtedness. "Gillian is going to do without new construction for his friends," Phil muttered. "As soon as the facts are indisputable, I'll lay them before him and Leedy in the Governor's own office—and get it clearly settled at the same time that deans and department heads select the teachers." Leedy will understand, Phil reflected with satisfaction. He's already thinking of next fall's votes, and he'll be afraid to let Gillian go on grafting or make plums of teaching positions.

To Phil so totally engrossed, the patriotic wrath of inch-high headlines and shouting street crowds at the destruction of the *Maine* came like a

great wind out of the night—as when a man awakens into half slumber to hear it about him in the trees, about the cornices and in the dashing of rain flooding against window panes and obscuring vision. The violence of its arrival subsides, but the leaves are left dripping. There is unpredictable weather in the gray overcast where before there was blue sky, and he looks out upon a new day into a world he but half recognizes. Phil's hopes would not let him accept dissolution of the Populist movement into a crusade for the nation's honor which everyone could join regardless of politics. In succeeding weeks he worked on at paring down Gillian's budget, preoccupied with anticipated objections from the college president. When Congressional declaration of Cuban independence and McKinley's call for volunteers awakened him, he saw opportunity through prompt action to get his appropriation approved unnoticed amid distraction to war. He made an appointment with Leedy and notified Gillian to meet with them. Then he wired Andy to come back the next day.

It had been showering intermittently all day the afternoon Phil left his downtown office briefcase in hand to see the Governor. The air was both fresh with spring and yet chilly from winter with puddles along the street. But the weather had not deterred a military parade, and he watched the band pass, water drops glistening on polished horns. He did not realize that the column of men marching behind, together with the flag-waving crowd cheering from both sidewalks, were all heading for the Capitol until they turned off Kansas Avenue before him. People with flags had thronged the statehouse square with more gathering, some running; and he crowded forward to get inside before the grounds became packed. On the steps to the main entrance he stopped to watch as a great flourish and prolonged cheer arose for the band and its immediate followers who tramped through a passage held open by police and formed into ranks in a lawn-space below the Governor's balcony. A thousand voices began shouting for Leedy, and the formation of men took up a chant: "We want to fight. We want to fight!" The French doors above opened, and Leedy came forth in company with an erect, small man trim in his black Vandyke beard and uniform of a United States army officer. At sight of him the band and the cheering united into a mighty uproar. "Hurrah for Funston!" Leedy seized his own flag from its balcony socket with both hands and waved back until the shouting subsided. The band ceased with a long rattle of drums and a new chanting began: "Down with Spain. Remember the *Maine*!"

Leedy nodded in every direction, beaming and smiling. His face was flushed with pink all the way up over his bald forehead. Before he spoke he drew his stooped shoulders awkwardly straight to match the military

posture of the officer beside him and stiffened his chin so high that his goatee projected. "I have never been so proud of my state as at this moment. I shall wire President McKinley forthwith that every Kansan is first an American!" A new surge of cheers drowned him until he stepped to the railing to address those in ranks below. "Colonel Funston is here to organize our recruiting stations. You men down there send your roll to my office. We expect a quota call from Washington at any moment, and I promise you will be first."

Phil went up the remaining steps and found a military guard at the Capitol entrance, but the regular doorman recognized him and endorsed admittance. Along corridors he heard unusual stirring within offices. President Gillian had not arrived when Phil entered Leedy's waiting room. There it struck him surely that this war excitement had brought unexpected opportunity. He sat down and opened his briefcase for some swift replanning. It would be possible at the moment to slip through an appropriation matching all of last year's. When he finished and saw that the clock had turned past the appointment hour, he began to chafe. Voices rose and fell unintelligibly inside the Governor's office, and he remembered that during his preoccupation numerous military figures had entered. Where the hell was Gillian?

Phil rose and questioned the secretary. She had no information on President Gillian. "Since he apparently is not keeping the appointment," Phil said impatiently, "I'll see the Governor alone."

"Governor Leedy left instructions for no interruptions during conference on his recruitment program."

"Very well. I'll be here when it's finished."

It was past four-thirty when the army personnel filed out and Phil was admitted. Leedy met him at the door and closed it behind them. "I've established Camp Leedy! I want you to handle the publicity." He hustled Phil to his desk spread with maps and papers and showed him the signed directives. "It'll be right outside the city, the command post and biggest camp in the state!"

In confusion of surprise and exasperation, Phil took time to pretend examining the documents thrust into his hands. He looked up when Leedy said, "I've been telephoning you all afternoon at your office to come and get this for the newspapers."

"I wasn't there because I was here," Phil said, "waiting for the appointment I had with you for myself and Gillian, who didn't arrive." He saw recollection come into Leedy's eager face.

"I meant to notify you President Gillian couldn't come. He's working out a special training program for the college military department!"

"I think that might have been postponed one day to assure ourselves funds to educate for an entire year," Phil answered curtly. Leedy looked at him sharply, his thin eyebrows lifting and detracting from the happy excitement in his expression. "I wanted to discuss the college budget and get it promptly before committee," said Phil. "During all this excitement it would be endorsed with hardly an examination."

Leedy's eyebrows arched suddenly very high. "We are in a national emergency. A college budget cannot be given priority."

Phil winced and slowly swallowed. "Is that to say, sir, that our party program for education is to be put aside?"

"Certainly not. It becomes secondary for the time."

"How long? This is an opportune moment."

"Till victory!" Leedy's voice rose with impatience. He halted, obviously catching himself and smiled amenably. "We can't let our opposition accuse us of failing the nation in a crisis, can we? Think of the publicity in being foremost to support it."

"It may be popular now, but this is not November," Phil said.

"If the war proves that short, so much the quicker for getting back to state problems." Leedy paused again. "I know how strongly you feel for better state schools, but this is only postponement—at longest until next term."

If you get a second term, thought Phil. "You're the Governor," he said.

"You will look after the publicity?"

"Yes, I'll continue to handle the newspapers." Phil felt suddenly trapped and ashamed for not having forthrightly stated his doubts, and without looking at the Governor fumbled open his briefcase. He took from it his sheaf of budget papers and laid it coldly on the marble-topped executive desk. "For your earliest consideration," he said, turned and left the office. On the Capitol steps when the fresh, raw air of freedom struck his face, his hands became shaky, his knees weak. Yet he kept his stride. About him the green-shooting lawn had been left trampled and muddy by the crowd.

Phil returned to his office too furious and dismayed to face his family that evening and Maggie's lack of understanding. For the first time he phoned her that he would not come home to supper. The only satisfaction he could feel came from an element of self pride of being one to retain judgment during hysteria. Alone in his office that thought began to possess and to stimulate his mind. If only he could have made the Governor see the insanity of the moment. As Phil paced the floor he began to re-

hearse indisputable reasoning which would surely have convinced Leedy if only he had not been taken so unawares without time to prepare his case. Perhaps it was not too late. He could set it down forcefully and clearly in a letter to the Governor. He went quickly to his desk.

Phil worked for several hours under pressure of creative thought before his concentration began to tire and questions of practicality to intrude. He sat back and read the pages. Even without revision they held stirring logic woven with quotations from Bryan on cumulative good of "grass-roots" education and with arguments against its neglect for wasted energy of war. Yet despite pride in the composition he recognized its hopelessness. War was here with the recruiting program already set up. Phil closed tightly for a moment his eyes which were tired and sore, and pressed his hands to his temples which were aching. Yet all the evening need not have been wasted. When Andy arrived he could use the best of these arguments before Leedy and the committee to force quick action on the college budget at least.

The night was so far gone that Phil stayed on for his early morning meeting with reporters and was not expecting Andy when he burst into the office ahead of the news interview, unshaven from an all-night journey. "I've just resigned from the legislature to join the Rough Riders!"

Andy's disheveled arrival and announcement set Phil forward in his chair erect and wide awake. "Call it back!"

"My resignation?"

"Yes, right now! Before it's accepted and too late." Phil saw Andy stiffen and stare.

"You don't mean that?"

"Of course I mean it. I wired you because our whole program is being forgotten. Right now is when I need you most."

"Our country needs me most," Andy said. "We don't have to finish right now. You and Leedy can keep things alive till next term."

"Leedy is a damned fool!" Phil spoke explosively without thought and then tried to collect himself. "He's gambling everything on the war to re-elect him, and it won't. It's now or never for us, and you can't walk out on your promise to the voters."

Andy's face burned promptly. "It isn't walking out to go fight for your country! You ask the people!"

Phil saw the anger kindled in his cousin's face by his own temper and steadied himself. "You're right like Leedy now but only for this moment." He spoke the words quietly, yet his voice sounded unnatural and cold where he wanted it to be desperately earnest. "If the people have gone crazy, it's all the more reason for us to keep our heads." Phil waited but

Andy remained stonily silent. "You'll ruin your future, going off with Teddy Roosevelt," he warned. "He's always been against the People's Party. Stop and think."

"I have thought, but you sound like *you* hadn't! I didn't know this was coming nor did anybody who voted; so I'm not bound. It's a hundred times more important than the stuff we campaigned for. Do you want us to fold our arms while the Spaniards make our neighbors slaves!"

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Andy!" Phil did not hear his voice rising again. "You can't believe Roosevelt cares a damn about the Cubans. He wants to be in the newspapers, and you'll get yourself branded a Republican along with him."

"This is above politics!" Andy shouted back. "It's for our country and we're all in it together. Bryan is going to organize a regiment. I'd go with him except I'll get there quicker with Roosevelt."

Phil choked a retort to call Bryan a headline seeker. He pushed his fists, which had clinched under the desk, between his knees where they could not pound the top. He must say the right things promptly and clearly to stop Andy, and he tried to think what they would be. That which flashed into mind and stuck blocking all else was a Grange picture out of years past of a boy sitting manfully in the Steward's chair too large for him, with longing in his blue eyes for a fling with the disorderly youths at the rear of the schoolroom. Andy looked again very much like that boy as he stood straightening and calming himself. He spoke first, but not until he had looked so deeply into Phil's eyes that Phil felt his return gaze weakened. "Sometimes there are things a person just has to do," said Andy slowly. "It comes from his inside out, and a man can't stop himself. Maybe it was in him when he was born. I've never seen you understand that in people. I guess your continual logic gets in your way."

"Did you never wonder that I broke up a home and dragged my family into the uncertainty of politics?" Phil asked him. It was not what he was trying to say, and he said it without looking up.

At length, breaking through what seemed to be a long, long silence, he heard Andy's voice again. "I'm sorry, and I wish this were not bigger so that I could stay. Whether you think so or not, I still know it is bigger—and I have to be in on it."

Phil did not answer and Andy continued. "I wish you didn't feel as you do. I even thought you might go with me. We've been together on so many things."

"We are sure as hell not together on this!"

There was another shorter silence and the shuffle of a slow step forward. "I go to San Antonio. You can wish me luck, can't you?"

Phil turned his head. Andy was holding out his hand across the desk, his face taugth with regrets. Phil stood up and they shook hands stiffly and briefly. "All right. Good luck."

Through the days following Andy's departure there was no one about the Capitol offices for Phil to talk to. He got fierce, meager satisfaction in refusing President Gillian permission to join the University in granting degrees to seniors leaving school to enlist. "I mean to see our college remembered as one to remain sane in the midst of insanity," Phil told him. Then, with heat for battle in his blood, he wrote the deans he would back them in fighting political appointment of faculty members, and he forced Gillian into line with a threat to Leedy to expose the whole college building program.

Yet curtailed on school funds and with the Populist cause disintegrating, Phil's anger at Andy's desertion mounted, bottled within. May 30th brought the greatest Memorial Day for flag waving the state had ever seen; and that evening, unable to contain himself, he burst out on the whole subject to his family. At home it was Clarence, who spoke out defiantly as had Andy.

"I hope it lasts till I'm old enough to join!"

On him Phil turned in wrath. "You're crazy as a loon! War never settles *anything!*"

"We have to d-defend ourselves, don't we? Didn't them Spaniards blow up the *Maine*?"

"I don't know and you don't either. Nobody'll *know* until they raise her years from now—and then maybe they can't tell."

"W-well, Uncle Andy thought so, and Oscar K-K-Karns, that nobody used to like, got up and went!"

"Andy's not your uncle, and he's a God damned fool! I told him so. If that young Karns gets himself killed, it'll be good riddance, but Andy's place was here on the job!"

Clarence threw back his head to further assert his opinions, but Phil gave him an order. "Shut your mouth! And stop that damned stuttering. Andy will wish to Christ he had stayed home if he gets shot, and don't let me hear another word out of you. You don't have a lick of sense!"

Clarence dropped his gaze and looked to Electra, but she failed to meet his stubborn glance. Sulking and with black eyes rebellious, the boy followed his mother and Electra to the kitchen when they went to their basket of clothes ready sprinkled for ironing. To them he said loudly: "When I'm a man, I bet I'll do what I please!" Before Phil could rise to punish him Maggie's voice spoke out. "Your father was *right*, and I don't

want to hear you talk of a thing like that again either!" She spoke more sharply than Phil had ever before heard her to the children or anyone else, and Electra, too, chimed in aroused. "You are being stupid. I'm ashamed of you wanting to kill people."

Phil did not look up when Clarence shuffled past toward the boys' bedroom, stepping around Shannon sprawled on his stomach on the middle of the rug absorbed in a Hans Christian Andersen picture book. Phil knew Maggie had reprimanded, without knowledge of historical issues, from her protective fears of a mother who did not want her boy to go to war. Yet he approved of her for her feelings. He suspected she had spoken loudly for his own ears—to relieve him of an unpleasant duty in discipline. Slowly he refilled his pipe and turned to his newspaper. In the settled quiet of the household he grew calmer than he had felt for days.

Maggie had indeed spoken out so that Phil would overhear. She sensed in the outburst which antagonized Clarence, that Phil was seeking to turn to his family for understanding against some manner of great disappointment which the war had brought him. She could not hope to share it, and realizing that, tears glistened in her eyes as she ironed, from her deep want that his family should not fail him as she felt she herself so often did.

Electra sorted and folded clothing nimbly through both baskets without intruding upon Maggie's feelings, then ran to dress for practice in the high school senior play. Maggie knew that Electra opposed Clarence from motives like her father's, but also that the girl understood her too; and her stepdaughter became more than ever a link to Phil. When she returned for last-minute inspection and spun around before Maggie with yellow braids coiled high for the young wife's part she was to play, she looked so slim and pretty that Maggie seized her and kissed both her cheeks. "Now go show yourself off to your father," she whispered, giving her a pat which was also a little push. Maggie listened and smiled with Phil's exclamation of approval, but she went back to work feeling hardly less sober. She had never doubted that Phil tried not to fail any of his family, though activities of job and evening lodge lectures were drawing him farther and farther from them. He gave her weekly cash allowance beyond her needs. He had pointed out the advantages of tap water and furnace heat.

Maggie knew that Phil saw and felt concern for her unhappiness which had become worse than the loneliness in Plainsboro without him. Against the dragging hours of her present idleness Phil had urged her to forget farms and enjoy a rest, to go visiting among people. She had tried his advice uncomplainingly and failed. The two afternoons she had been in-

vited out, she had timidly accepted; but her diffidence had promised too much of a social burden for the capital's ladies. No more invitations came nor did anyone return the calls. Later Phil had invited her to join the Eastern Star. "If you want to, I'll petition with you, and then we can go to lodge together." She was grateful that when she shook her head he had not urged her then as he had into accompanying him to a banquet at the Agricultural College to address the faculty upon completion of the chemistry hall.

Maggie's hand trembled at her ironing in vivid recollection. The big dining hall and immaculate tables with fragile china and glassware, courses in food, the confusing array of silver—all combined to leave her in dread of touching anything. She ate practically nothing, addressed no one, and could find few words to reply when spoken to.

Sitting across from Phil, she had watched President Gillian rise tall and very straight after dessert and tap his glass for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Everyone is familiar with the purpose of this occasion. In fact, a good many people from as far away as the University have heard of it!"

There had been an outbreak of applause and laughter for which Maggie saw no cause, but to which Gillian smiled happily.

"There is little for me to add. Immediately upon leaving the banquet room, the doors of a magnificent edifice will swing wide in open house. For this most important addition to our campus in a decade, as for other construction in progress, our great college owes a debt to be commemorated primarily to one man. Tonight as President I am going to break a tradition long sacred to our college, that of honoring distinguished faculty members emeritus with their names on our new buildings.

"Ladies and gentlemen—" President Gillian turned sidewise and extended his hand to Phil. "With pleasure I give you John Phillip Garwood, the man who gave us our new chemistry building—Garwood Hall!"

Loud and prolonged handclapping faded but rose again as Phil stood up. Maggie knew that he had a speech rehearsed, but flushed with astonishment and almost tearful with pleasure he searched now for new words. "Thank you," he said at last. "Thank you—all of you." His opening voice had trembled.

"I came here with a speech which is not now in keeping with the honor you have bestowed. There is only one greater honor you can bestow, and that is not for now nor for you alone but for the future, because it is not really a building that you have received but an opportunity—an incumbent opportunity to make your school of chemistry the finest in the nation."

He held up his hand to a new and yet somehow quietly rich applause that made Maggie's heart swell until it pressed against her throat. He was smiling when the room grew still; and his eyes had been on her, frightening her with the thought that he might point her out.

"I was impressed by the definition of a model impromptu speech I once heard from Mark Twain: 'When you have been left with nothing more to be said, sit down.' And, friends, we have all too often listened to speakers left with nothing more to be said. Thank you."

Sitting until the last moment after he had finished in order to escape attention, Maggie had felt through pride for Phil a fearful awareness of the gulf separating them. In the corner where she hid from the gowned and chatting women, her face had burned from exaggerated thoughts of conspicuousness of her large body and strong hands, and safely home she would have died rather than gone to another such affair.

That banquet had been in the first winter of their Topeka residence before she had become pregnant again, and while Phil was busy and eager without this late war discouragement which made it so difficult to add the worry of another baby.

Shannon came in heavy-lidded to be kissed for bed, but ready dressed in his nightgown by Phil; and she sent him back to be tucked in.

Phil had laid aside his reading and was staring at the wall when she finished ironing and went to join him. He seemed to be waiting for her, for he got up at once from his leather chair and came to her side on the sofa where she sat down with hands tired in her lap. "I wouldn't worry, Mom, about Clarence going to war," he said, searching her face. "It can't last till he's old enough."

Maggie felt grateful warmth for his concern, even though he had misunderstood her distress. It made this seem like the right moment to speak. "It's something else." She took a long breath and looked at him almost humbly. "I'm—I'm going to be sick again."

Phil sat a moment immobile. "How soon?" he asked.

"Late in the fall. I haven't been feeling so well this time. Phillip—This time I'm afraid."

"You should see a doctor," he answered dutifully. "And don't worry about this either. If you're in any danger at all, we'll take you to the best hospital and specialists in the city."

"I don't want to go to a hospital. I'd rather have Doctor MacGregor. Please can't we go back? I want my baby born at home."

Phil put his arm about her, and then in one of their rare moments of tenderness they kissed. "If you wish it," he promised. "Andy's away and our legislation going to pot. I was just thinking I was not doing much

good here any longer. As soon as the college faculty has been hired and the Governor can replace me, we'll go."

"Thank you, Phillip." Fleetinglly, her fingers touched the sandpapery mystery of his cheek.

Phil saw that her gaze was on his streaked temples, and he smiled gently. "I'm feeling kind of tired myself," he said.

Chapter 18

On the afternoon of June 23, 1898, six weeks after Andy's quarrel with Phil and one day ahead of the battle of Las Guasimas, the main contingent of the American Fifth Army Corps began disembarking on the beaches below Siboney, Cuba. It was the first massive United States military expedition to foreign soil. To cover principal landing operations, General Lawton's nine regiments of regular infantry had gone ashore the day before and entrenched defensively across the gap in first coastal hills through which ran the Santiago road.

Andy York and Oscar Karns were on hand with the Rough Riders and a squadron each of the First and Tenth regiments of General Wheeler's dismounted cavalry division. Roosevelt and Wheeler had enthusiastically beached their troops at Daiquiri a day early. General-in-chief Shafter had ordered them to encamp there, but before his dispatch could arrive they had left on a forced night march up the Daiquiri-Siboney road for Santiago and collided after noon with the rear of Lawton's right flank established infantry. Lawton refused to allow them forward of his position, and the foot-lagging troopers settled in an adjacent coconut grove, dirty and sweat-weakened from the long march and cursing an infantry command which had not saved space aboard ship for cavalry horses.

Heavy thunder clouds were gathering and rumbling. They came in low and white from the sea, but rising against the mountains they darkened and rolled back again black and turbulent. The men had not eaten hot food in thirty-six hours, and they hurried their fires. The salt pork was only half fried and coffee hardly heated when the rain hit. The first unbelievably huge drops to strike the fires exploded into little puffs of steam, but the flames had no defense against the downpour which followed.

Andy and Oscar, cooking together, gulped the last weak contents of their tincups and watched the final embers sizzle out into a heap of wet, charred sticks.

"Why in hell do the Spaniards want this country!" Andy asked.

"For all of me they can have the goddam thing," Oscar said. Big

Chuck Guthrie grinned across at them and raised his voice in an exaggerated moan. "Oh, what a bunk house I left back in Texas!"

"You mention roof again," Jack Lawrence vowed, "and I'll ram my carbine down your throat. By God, I will!"

A quartette of college voices began an elaborately plaintive rendition of "On the Banks of the Wabash."

"Damn you," Walter Peterson bellowed, "I'm *from* Indiana!" Oscar and Andy joined in a rush from all directions which upset the melodious offenders into the mud.

Yet the clowning soon dwindled. The men were without tents or blankets, having thrown them away to lighten the march. They chilled and gathered into silenced clusters backs to the rain, huddled tight for collective warmth. There they tried to smoke the soggy little black, sour, tobacco-leaf cigarettes bought from natives.

One hour passed, then another. As Andy watched the dismal light of evening change into night, the clouds at last drifted on down the coast. Oscar took out his harmonica, and the men's cheerfulness rekindled with new fires. Some stripped and pressed naked toward the heat, holding shirts and pants spread before them.

After Andy had dried his front he sat down with knees drawn up and his back comfortably to the blaze. On the beach beyond the village, infantry and supplies were still coming off transports. From the Rough Riders' camp site above, the beach sand looked white as frosty meadow in moonlight under the fierce, convergent beams of naval searchlights, and the boats pallid, emerging out of darkness into the glare to land. Occupants were singing "We Have Remembered the Maine." There was confusion of shouts and laughter each time crews plunged into the surf to beach the boats by hand. Men ran floundering alongside, pushing to help ride an incoming wave until it broke in foam and the keels grounded. Earlier arrivals were drying clothing, for among dark uniforms nude, white bodies shifted about holding garments on branches to campfires, pale red and smoky by contrast to the intense brilliance in which the area was focused. Lights of ships blinked and twinkled out at sea like a city in the background. From one came music of a regimental band playing "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." In shore behind the Rough Riders steep jungle hillsides of their little wedge-shaped valley came to point as a vague, black crestline closing upon them; and beyond all the sounds of misplaced human commotion was the measured, relentless breaking of the sea.

Oscar squatted his greater height alongside Andy, listening. "It's all kind of pretty," he said at length.

Andy nodded. Perhaps to some the scene bore resemblances to a seaside amusement park. For Andy, from sparsely settled Kansas plains, it was a coming home at last to people. He stretched his legs against numbness. "I'll bet those boys are glad to get on land," he said. "God, it was hot inside the ships!"

"There's only one place hotter," Oscar said.

As they sat quietly amid the companionable activities on beach and camp, Andy felt sorry for Oscar. Andy had thought himself the sole recruit from Plainsboro until they met in the training camp. Not even Ezra Karns had known of his son's whereabouts until Andy had written it home. Probably the shriveled runt strutted all over town bragging about his boy. Maybe it was because Oscar was so large that the old man lorded it over him. Phil had written, "He'll always be a worthless devil." All of his few brief letters had been that blunt and cold. There should be a way to make Phil understand better, and he could try again in his own next letter, starting with Oscar. "I know he got Irene Barker into trouble and let old Ez pull him out instead of standing by her. He's a loudmouth, but here he is somebody from home, and he *has* been a good soldier."

Later, after the order to get some rest, Andy said to Oscar. "I kept a blanket. I'll share it with you."

"I'm going on guard detail," Oscar said.

The men put their damp, heavy woollens back on and began lying down on the wet earth wherever they were. Andy rolled up into the moist, clinging blanket with one arm under his head as a pillow and stared at the strange silhouettes of the palms—trees he had never seen except in tubs prior to embarkation in Florida. The chirp and drone of night insects gradually replaced the hitching movements of his fellows. Presently he was listening alertly to the foreign sounds of a thousand busy little rustlings and stirrings in the vegetation which is the nighttime soul of tropical jungle.

"More damned kinds of bugs," someone grumbled out, "and all of 'em bite or sting!"

Andy snickered but shivered too—at thought of prickly feet scampering across his face as he slept. He could tell of this on return home, a hero stepping off the train with army pack at Plainsboro station, on the street still in uniform before people but free from drill and discipline. —Yet beyond the regimentation he had felt a sensation of heady, stimulating well-being exonerated of responsibilities in the training camp life of a recruit, and in the off-duty evenings of beer drinking with comrades in taverns new and strange. This freedom removed Andy further than any number of miles from the struggles for Populist legislation or the gauntlet

that caused Phil to resign from the Board of Education, and even from Phil's last caustic argument: "War never settles anything. For Christ's sake, Andy, stop and think!"

He was still awake when Roosevelt and Wood passed with Oscar's detail among the bed-down troopers. Orders were given softly and food, snatched from unguarded beach depots, was laid beside each man. Oscar winked as he tucked an extra package beside Andy. Roosevelt wore his Stetson with wide brim tilted back, reflecting firelight upon his face. Andy marked the easy identification thus assured and grinned. Teddy drank beer with us in San Antonio, Andy thought, and he got us new rifles and smokeless powder shells. He's after political prestige, but he's earning it. Tomorrow there would be time to write that also to Phil.

Andy pulled the food packets inside his blanket safe from theft. This confirmation of his leaders' concern for his own and comrade's welfare was soothing. Gradually the myriad pattern of tropical stars lost their wonder; they grew confused and then disappeared.

The stars were still there, shining in a sky with the brown-black of pre-dawn when the troopers were tapped to wakefulness. It seemed to Andy he had but drifted off; he felt stiff and chilled.

They were ordered to assemble quietly, and the whisper passed to maneuver around the flank of Lawton's entrenchments. Over there in the infantry encampment night silence and darkness held, save for picket fires. On the beach, troops were still coming ashore, and the crates of supplies stacked above high tide had grown to look mountainous.

Canteens had been filled the night before. The men moved off, crunching hardtack with raw, smoked bacon between swallows of water. The Regular Cavalry had already gone up the Santiago road toward the enemy position. The Rough Riders, single file, followed a jungle ridge trail which paralleled the road on its left. Andy was soon drenched from dew-wet foliage, but exercise threw off the chill of the night, and like his comrades he stopped blithely. Faster and faster the Rough Riders were hastened by their leaders.

The sun rose, giving warm and breathless humidity as it changed dew into steam. Contact with the main road and Regular Cavalry was lost as intervening jungle widened. Tropical mists were still on the landscape, clinging to swales and ravines in white, stagnant layers that reduced observation, when scattered rifle shots broke out abruptly on their right front. The men quickened into a trot.

Andy was with the lead units. He knew that somewhere ahead this trail and the road were supposed to converge. There the Regulars had al-

ready contacted the enemy. Then some retreating Cuban scouts ran pell-mell into them, causing a jostling halt. While officers conferred with the natives and with each other, the firing to the right grew fierce.

From the sounds, Andy judged himself nearly abreast of the engagement. Yet the trail had not come out anywhere. Save for their packed and narrow passageway, the almost impenetrable jungle rose about them. While he waited, fingering his carbine, an extremely tall fellow forced his way a step aside from the column and tried a couple of experimental shots. There was a startling and nearly instantaneous result, the crackle of a rifle volley and a multitudinous whing and zip of bullets through and above the foliage. Thirty feet back down the line Andy heard a thick, sodden plunk like the sound of a jackrabbit rifle shot through the belly. There was a scream. He turned his head and saw a man with astonishment on his face falling backwards between two other Rough Riders. A confusion of barked commands, some for deployment, broke out filtered through with curses. Roosevelt himself came running down the line, unfastening the flap of his holster on the way. He charged the brush to the right, waving his arm.

"After me, men—every other one!" he ordered.

Colonel Wood led left, and men began following one leader or the other by turns. Andy was not far behind Roosevelt. Once in the jungle he lost touch with all save his two or three immediate comrades. But lieutenants and sergeants struggled back and forth, getting the line strung out and then to moving ahead. In spite of deployment there seemed to be no flank contact with the Regulars from the rather remote popping of Krag-Jorgensens and lighter whip-like return of Spanish Mausers.

Andy pulled his knife from its belt sheath and slashed at the undergrowth, side-stepping and tripping as he tried to force passage. Finally he gave that up and got down flat, dragging himself through the inches of clearance beneath vines and creepers. After what might have been a hundred yards or fifty the growth thinned on a gentle rise. There ahead, already some Rough Riders lay prone just back of the top, their cavalry campaign hats slung behind their shoulders, carbines steadied on their elbows as they replied to the fire breaking over them. Andy slid forward on his belly to a clump of grass and parted it with his gun barrel. A breeze had begun to stir, separating fog into slowly drifting patches of fleece and by intervals through streamers revealing breastworks of stone and earth along the crest of the next incline. The intervening swale had been cleared barren. Andy wiped perspiration from his eyes and squinted hard, trying to see someone to shoot at. Several times he thought he detected movements along the top of the hostile embankment, but impressions were

too fleeting and distance too great to be sure. He shot anyway—once, twice, thrice. Then more rapidly on chance. The enemy responded in great volume.

Sounds of Wheeler's Regulars, still blazing away, registered to Andy as he reloaded. Then, presently, reaching for fresh cartridges he was shocked to discover his belt two-thirds empty. He became suddenly conservative of ammunition; and as his comrades' fire likewise dwindled, Andy wormed backwards to a tree. Prone and still behind protection of its trunk with a growth of rank ferns overspreading him, realization came that he had been shooting at people.

"Jesus Christ, I'm in battle!" he thought aloud, and the utterance seemed to have sprung from a part of him outside his mind. After a moment he stood up carefully back of the tree for a good look.

The rising sun, now bearing down bright and hot, brought into sharp relief sturdy earthworks with faint little stabs of flame leaping from all along the rim. Andy got down hurriedly. "God," he muttered, "will we charge that?" He knew there were no reserves for flanking envelopment, that all Rough Riders had deployed into skirmish line.

The American fire had all but died out, but there were piercing cries of wounded for help. The men nearest on either hand called confusedly to one another, voices asking what to do. The Spaniards began to fire faster than ever. Andy listened to swarms of bullets raking the jungle with each volley. Through dragging suspense of waiting, the vision came of himself and his fellows running down that open slope before him in attack straight into a point-blank volley. Could he make himself charge if ordered?

There came the crash of a fresh burst of Mauser shots, cutting twigs and stirring branches above him. Cold waves began following one another through Andy's body, and his sweat suddenly poured faster than ever. He buried his face in his arms and dug his fingers deep into the rooted earth to keep from rising to flee, and even held against the ground, his body shook as a swell of panic blanked his mind. When thoughts came again after a moment, they re-assured him that he had conquered the cowardice of flight, and gradually his trembling ceased. He lay lax, feeling weak and cleansed.

By and by a captain sneaked along the line. Andy cowered out of sight of the officer, but he heard him urging other men to hold. "The infantry will be coming. We've sent back for help."

The position of the Rough Riders was high enough that a section of winding Santiago road behind was visible. Scattered shouts breaking out along their front first told of help at hand when at last it approached. Then

Andy rose cautiously again behind his tree and saw the dark figures in a long, sinuous column of fours streaming forward at a steady trot. A great feeling of power and pride in homeland and its army might surged through him with his relief. As the battalion came to attention of more Rough Riders, their cheering carried down into Wheeler's sector. To the left some University of Kansas boys started giving their weird gridiron yell. Andy joined their chant along with others who had never heard of K.U. or a Jayhawk bird. A wild fusillade of shooting and hurraing burst out all along the front.

Spanish observers, too, had caught sight of the reinforcements, for the uproar won over hours of firing. There was the sight of many men in light-colored uniforms abruptly leaving the enemy defenses, and that sight was too much for the rejoicing cavalymen. Andy rushed with his comrades out of cover in pursuit. Officers ran with them, shouting encouragement now unneeded. Yelling and shooting, the ranks charged in a disorderly gallop. By the time they hit the breastworks, however, the Spaniards had vanished into the jungle.

Chapter 19

After taking Las Guasimas, the Rough Riders and regular cavalry promptly settled into the evacuated Spanish works, and the battalion of colored infantry, whose appearance had decided the battle, withdrew again.

The Las Guasimas ridge was really the western bluff to the San Juan River valley, and Andy looked over this foreign terrain that dropped in folds to a broad, oblong basin with the main stream meandering along the opposite side. To the right rose misted peaks of inland mountains. To the left green coastal hills stretched away some four miles to the flash of the sea. The Santiago road angled across the valley, here following creek beds, there slicing through jungle swamp which was cut by stagnant, secondary channels of the main river. Beyond, the road disappeared entirely, climbing into a succession of steep bluffs—San Juan Hill. Nearer, about a mile directly forward of Las Guasimas, rose a single knoll-like swell, El Pozo, with a steep forward slope facing San Juan and a gentle incline backward toward the Americans—an elevated meadow island in a flat, dense sea of enemy jungle which seemed ideal to Andy for sharpshooters and patrols of Spanish raiders.

All of the remaining morning and through the noon hour without rations, the cavalymen dug and built to strengthen their captured positions, urged by their officers and by an uneasy satisfaction in holding the front

line. Then, in the afternoon came whole regiments of Lawton's infantry. Marching with veteran insolence they passed the troopers and just beyond fanned out and began to entrench themselves on the slopes to the valley. Several platoons disappeared on into the jungle and presently reappeared on the grassy summit of El Pozo, where they began to set up observation posts. Yet others went to work hacking out a connecting roadway. To Andy the presence of the newcomers between him and danger was both humiliating and comforting.

As evening approached Oscar showed up with shelter halves and two blankets he had stolen at the beach the night before. He and Andy pitched their dog kennel tent and piled firewood. Pack trains of native mules had been passing with provisions, and they started for the unloading area only to meet angry troopers returning.

"You can't get anything down there," they said. "It's infantry stuff."

"We're all in the same army," Andy pointed out.

"Maybe so but those boys are sitting on their dumps with sawed-off shotguns!"

There had already been fist fights over taunts by infantrymen of having sent "niggers to the rescue."

"That damned Yankee general," Andy heard Guthrie say as the Texan passed them turning back.

Oscar and Andy ate scraps left of their emergency rations with water from a shallow well the Spaniards had dug into a seep spring in the bluffs and went to bed hungry. At least it had missed raining.

The next morning there was a late breakfast issue of bread and salt pork in half rations, and Andy suggested they go back to Siboney. "Surely they'll give us grub back there."

"Yeah, there's plenty on the beach," Oscar agreed. He cursed General Lawton for the long, hard trek ahead. "The bastard's got all the wagons and wants to starve us out!" Rumors of a quarrel between Wheeler and Lawton over the attack on Las Guasimas supported Oscar's logic. "I hate every goddam one of them high-ranking sons-of-bitches."

"We may not have to go all the way to get something," Andy said.

After a while came a shower. For the moment it cooled the air which afterwards became more oppressively hot than ever. Oscar's flow of profanity at their own supply system for boggling soon included the whole expeditionary force. Then luck favored them. Down the road where it forded Amo Creek, an oncoming creaking of wet leather and rattling chains rose to a crescendo in whipcracks and shouts, and ended in a stream of oaths.

Rounding the bend they saw it, a food wagon with a lone driver stuck in mid-stream, and they hurried forward.

"Need help?"

"Hell yes."

"All right. We'll wade in and push; we can't get no wetter."

Knee-deep in water and mud they laid shoulders to rear wheels in pretense of bracing, while holding back against possibility the vehicle might move. The straining team slipped and floundered and see-sawed.

"No use that way," Oscar panted, splashing around to the front. "I'll lengthen the drawchain to give the mules new footing and mebbe it'll go." He made the adjustment and looked back at Andy. Andy looked at him. Oscar had neglected to re-insert the clevis pin. "Let me handle the whip," he said.

Andy stepped back to push. He had seen the driver wrap the lines farmer-fashion about his wrists in a renewed grip, and his face radiated anticipation of the man's impending flight.

In all later years Andy never forgot that snap-shot impression of a human figure in bullfrog arc, or the landing which was much more than a frog splash. When the fellow got up, Oscar was already in loud-voiced pursuit of the runaway team and calling for help. There was nothing for the drenched man to do but join the chase. The mules were caught where a pack train blocked the road and brought back, but by that time Andy had unloaded what he wanted into the brush. They went sincerely to work upon the mired wagon after that, but it took the aid of a caravan of donkeys coming up from Siboney to get the vehicle moving.

Andy and Oscar stepped off into the jungle and ate their fill before their return. There were canned tomatoes, milk, coffee, a firm slab of officers' bacon, a carton of hardtack, a sack of yams, and—prize of prizes—a five pound bag of real American tobacco. It had been a long time since either had smoked to contentment. They rolled bulky cigarettes in labels torn from food cans and inhaled to the bottom of their lungs.

"You hooked a goddam plenty," Oscar complimented through his smoke.

"I made sure of enough to last. Probably the driver will catch hell when they check his load," Andy said with indifferent sympathy.

Rain began falling again on the way back, became heavy and sodden by the time they reached camp, but there rumor had spread jubilation. Half-way around the world Manila had fallen.

Their tent was standing in a pool, and the bedding so carefully spread out inside, soaked. Laboriously they drained their little area, then wrung out their blankets, and spread their topcoats on the mud.

"Tomorrow when the trees get dry," Oscar said, "we'll cut palm fronds for a mattress."

Neither grumbled over lack of foresight in drainage. In the darkness they hid their food, animal-like, a few cans buried here and there. They stripped and soaped their wet bodies, stepped outside and rinsed in the downpour before turning in. Stomachs pleasantly full, they talked of the momentous news. Any day now the war would be over.

There could be no military regularity among detachments so scattered. Men not on duty slept until they chose to get up.

It was light and the camp stirring when Andy awakened. For once the morning was free of mists, and he felt wonderfully refreshed in spite of the wet night. The sun was so bright and mild that he disregarded his soggy clothes and went about getting breakfast without dressing. In the clean air San Juan seemed almost near and the defenders visible as they moved about. He called Oscar when the coffee was boiling.

"The paper came off the cans last night," Andy reported as they squatted naked on their heels, mess-kits before them. "It's luck we have tomatoes instead of beans."

Oscar, emptying out his portion, grinned his heavy grin. "Tomatoes got a quieter temper." He gazed across the valley to the hills. The Spaniards seemed busy, and he indicated the ridge between mouthfuls. "It looks like we'd be doing something about that. It would be a tough place to take from anybody who would fight. They were givin' us enough hell right here. They had me keeping low till they tucked tail."

Andy gave him a queer, pleased look. "I had my belly in the dirt, and I'll bet Teddy did too. He wasn't as hell bent to be out in front right then. We'll knock them out over there though easy."

"Yeh?"

Andy swallowed and gestured with his tincup toward the sea and the warships riding there. "That's an easy range for the twelve-inchers. As soon as the Spanish get assembled, they'll steam in close to shore and blow them hill and all clear off the island. I guess you didn't see the bombardment they laid down for us at Daiquiri."

"Hell no. The transport I was on cleared out. We was ten miles at sea while things were noisy!"

"Well, they lammed shells onto shore that threw dirt high as the palm trees. Busted up houses like eggs. They're just waiting now."

The troops became weather-wise during the next days and learned to raise tent walls to sun the sheltered area and to drop them again at signs of converging clouds. They dried and aired blankets then rolled them

tightly. Mess call became regular and the food passable—after heart-burn and diarrhea had taught the men to throw away the beef.

Regularly each afternoon it rained, and Andy's happy capitalization on showers for bathing was taken up everywhere. Men ran about naked through the downpour, shouting and shaking themselves like bewildered ducklings in a first swim—unwares of a tropical peril among them more potent than all the bayonets in Spain. The blue woollens were forgotten except against evening chill, and the skins reddened then changed toward the color of the natives. Nightly across the San Juan Ridges barring their way the lights of Santiago beckoned of gaiety and Cuban girls and shelter of roofs. Medical staffs waited and hoped against the inevitable fevers, and the men began to grumble under idleness.

On the morning of June 30th, Andy saw the huge bulk of General Shafter in person, borne forward with his staff to the top of El Pozo. After noon orders came. Lawton's infantry broke camp and streamed down the road past the observation posts, disappearing off right on the Guantanamo trail to El Caney. Again the Cavalry's thrill of holding the position was brief, for the vacated area was promptly filled by Kent's division. By a little past four the newcomers and the cavalry were both on the march. The Rough Riders were first to reach the slopes to El Pozo, where the army was to halt for the night. It gave them time to prepare supper by daylight, and presently groups were roaming the vicinity. Much of the larger infantry contingent was still coming up unfed and hungry as darkness grew.

On the hill's summit shouts of orders and thudding of sledge hammers broke out. Andy left Oscar entertaining with his harmonica and climbed the slope with curious troopers. They found an artillery captain and a lieutenant directing the emplacement of a battery of field guns. Up there the night wind blew warm across the tall grasses, heavy with the moist smell of the Gulf ocean; and the moon grew now and again dim behind white sailing clouds. Off shore before Santiago, beams of revolving searchlights of Sampson's battleships crisscrossed in and about the harbor mouth and cut bright shafts across the sky. Andy was brought back from an interval of serenity and beauty by the grim implications of the installation work. He wondered as to the purpose of this light battery with the fire power of the fleet's great guns at hand.

There was little of interest in the activities; and the cavalymen, vaguely disappointed, had a last look at the lights of the city and slipped back to camp. The last of Kent's forces were just arriving.

About the same time that Andy finally went to sleep in his blanket roll to the tunes Oscar was still playing for a circle around the campfire, Lawton's mud-spattered soldiers were taking time out in a long, sinuous

line on the miserable trail to El Caney. Their rest was three tense hours of jungle blackness among mosquitos.

The time was just seven next morning, and the troops about El Pozo were eating their breakfast issue, when the dull boom of an artillery piece floated in from the distant right. They listened, and it was followed by three more blended together.

"That's Lawton's boys starting in on them," someone shouted.

The Rough Riders knew generally from their officers that they were to wait until El Caney was taken before they attacked so that enemy could not flank their assault upon San Juan. While they rested, faint rattle of infantry fire began to surround the blasts of the cannons. With nothing to do and no orders, little groups trooped up the slopes of El Pozo to watch their own battery go into action.

Andy and Oscar with some companions had just passed a cluster of deserted thatched shacks midway to the crest when the earth shook and an immense cloud of black powder smoke rolled up from the first volley, half blotting out the artillerists and spectators crowded about the emplacements. The jubilant scene above was not yet clearly revealed when there came another sound. Andy had a compressed split-second impression of a meteor-like rush of something unseen in the air, an impact of violence and weight, and a detonation which bounced him off his feet. When he got up groggily and looked about, two of several Cubans accompanying them lay shuddering in puddles of blood: Guthrie of the Rough Riders was flopping about on the ground; and Peterson, in a sitting position, rocked back and forth holding his shoulder. The first answering enemy shell had passed over its target, pinpointed by the black powder smoke, and burst in the very midst of their little party. Some of the recovering men began to run, indiscriminate of direction.

"Jesus Christ Almighty!" It was Oscar Karns's outburst that halted Andy's impulse to follow the fleeing men. Oscar turned to the wounded.

The Cubans were past helping; Andy saw that at a glance. He knelt beside Peterson and looped the uninjured arm around behind his neck. Blood from the shattered shoulder ran warm over Andy's wrist and hand pressed under the armpit. "Hang on."

Peterson yelled with pain as he was raised. Andy hesitated. A second shell roared over and exploded with a flash among the shacks. Then came another and another. The grass roofs began to flame and crackle.

"We've got to get out of here!" Andy cried.

Oscar, with the unconscious Guthrie across his powerful shoulders like a meal bag, was running stumbling down the hill. Andy followed, dragging the sagging, pleading, all but fainting Peterson.

Andy was still shaking from shock outside the first aid tent when the exchange of cannon fire suddenly ended leaving a silence thick and stifling.

Now, surely, was the time for naval bombardment; yet it failed to come. All at once as he stood trembling, Andy hated the navy with a violence beyond expression. Why didn't *they* do something!

Oscar Karns, looking sick, had left the tent before him and was not in sight. Andy hurried to the cavalry water cart and washed the crusted, drying stains from hands and sleeve. He bathed his face and found a shade tree where he lay down to cigarette after cigarette.

About ten o'clock the infantry formed, and cavalry officers began hurrying about, getting their own units into ranks, posting the patrol of Cuban scouts to lead the advance. Andy's fingers began shaking again as he fastened his ammunition belt and caught up his carbine. He took his place and watched with relief as Kent's forward platoons started moving off ahead of them down the Santiago road. While the troopers waited drawn up for orders, Roosevelt rode up and swung to the ground. Teddy was wearing a blue and white bandana tied pirate-like about the crown of his hat. He advanced to address his troops, stopped and looked at Kent's marching column—then went to join Wood and General Sumner. The trio departed hurriedly toward the headquarters tent of General McClermand. Not long afterwards the infantry was halted and pressed tightly against the flanking jungle to clear the narrow roadway.

"Attun-n-shun. Left face. Forwa-ard, march!"

Addressed to the entire body of cavalry, the shouted command was heard over the whole area and was soon being relayed in echoes by officers down the line. Andy tried to join the cheer which rose, but his voice cracked. His throat had gone dry at thought of leading in the attack, and he had clutched his carbine tighter to his side.

Pivoting on heels and balls of feet, Andy's outfit wheeled in its turn, and Andy stepped off after the man in front. In a little clearing alongside the arrested column of infantry he went by some men inflating an observation balloon. Elsewhere the Kent regiments waited stonily for the troopers tramping past two abreast. It seemed to Andy that the Rough Riders had scarcely reached cleared roadway and formed into column of fours in the wake of the regular cavalry when the sputter of Mausers remembered from Las Guasimas arose accompanied by the terrible whistling crack of bullets overhead. Looking back, he saw the balloon aloft. Artillery fire commenced.

The Rough Riders advanced on the double to regain contact with the

regular cavalry and ran into solid masses of halted troops. Thus stalled they in turn stalled Kent's infantry just as it was getting started.

Jostling and pressing increased congestion. They would move a few yards or feet and stop again. Meanwhile the sun bored down into their tortuous corridor of green. Above them jungle palm crests swayed and rustled in a visible breeze, and the sweating men cursed it. The deeper they penetrated, the sharper became the firing. Overhead bullets began to come lower. Shells began to burst short, spattering the foliage. The Rough Riders were under strict orders to hold fire and could see nothing to shoot at anyway—the severest test for any soldier, that of being called upon merely to take punishment.

Inching along with the column, Andy reached a creek. Its ford was a mass of wallowing men, waist deep in water and soft mud, their equipment hoisted above their heads. Now and then a bullet plunked among them. A man screamed and tumbled down the farther bank, and a comrade plunged after him. Thrust forward with the congestion, Andy was in and across. Then a few hundred yards beyond, their advance ceased.

One after another staff officers went ahead to break the jam. Roosevelt, in fine wrath, himself rode forward. Still there was no result. Men with bloody bandages began stumbling back or were borne past on litters. The whang of high bullets continued with the crush and explosion of shells in the vegetation. At intervals from here or there came that thunk of a ball striking flesh, sometimes with an outcry and then either groaning or silence as comrades moved the casualty from the trail.

The tightening in Andy's chest grew with the intensifying of stifling heat and casualties. The navy could still silence those batteries. Why the hell didn't they? Repeatedly he sipped from his canteen, trying to conserve water yet forced to relieve his parching mouth and throat. For God's sake get this over with! He began feeling again the dizzying waves of panic of Las Guasimas and fought with all will power to appear calm while watching the epidemic of fear around him.

The scattered Cuban soldiers squatted on naked heels and smiled up meaninglessly. Officers paced up and down the column. Men looked at each other and away. Desperately and still more desperately their eyes searched the jungle vastness. What was going on up ahead? Where was all the firing coming from? Reports of the rifles were distinct but far and near and indefinite of direction. At times they seemed to be approaching on the right. Could Lawton have been defeated at El Caney, letting the enemy flank them from the north? They might be surrounded! At any moment these troops might have recoiled in disorder—except that congestion made retreat impossible.

General Kent and two aides went forward past Andy, their horses jostling and almost trampling him. That trio returned surprisingly soon. The General was furious. He guided his mount with one hand while motioning continuously with the other. "Get those men to one side! Get those men to one side!" He barked the command over and over at every officer he saw.

Members of Sumner's staff were only a few minutes behind him repeating the order. Shortly thereafter pressure from the front eased. The cavalrymen were crowded into a column of two's along the right hand side of the trail; and the infantry, also in column of two's, moved up on their left. Faster and faster they went until a steady flow trotted by, rifles diagonally across chests.

Action lessened tension for everyone, and Andy tried to divert his fears by calculating his distance from the front by counting the number of infantry platoons. As the last regiments of the Sixth passed and the first units of the Sixteenth came along side, there was a momentary halt. Then cavalry and infantry alike, began to move. The Rough Riders cheered wildly.

At a point where the road crossed at right angles the muddy San Juan, officers were feverishly directing traffic, deflecting the infantry column left along the stream, the cavalry right. To the left of the ford, jungle extended only to the nearer bank, the farther rising as meadow land into the hills they had come to take; and the surface of the stream was churning in little spurts as if peppered by a hailstorm.

All along the crest of ridges from out the haze of battle smoke came miniature stabs of individual rifle shots, the sheet flame of volleys and lightning bursts of cannons. The infantry were having a hard time on the left where they had to deploy in the open. Men were dropping everywhere, but the platoons kept going in. Officers from colonels to sergeants were leading or hurrying them on. Near the ford Andy saw a tall, gray-bearded brigadier in field blue walking upright calmly and with folded arms back and forth behind his brigade, which was already prone and returning fire. Three or four hundred yards farther on other men were spilling out of the jungle from a secondary trail.

To the right, however, the river looped forward with fringe of cover beyond. A bullet kicked water into Andy's face as he waded in. Luckily it was not deep, and the troopers did not have to climb out for some distance. Roosevelt had rejoined his Volunteers at the ford; a-foot he led the way, splashing up the channel—like the men, crouching as he wallowed. An orderly, unable to keep up, followed leading his horse, wrenching at the snorting animal. In an elbow of the river under shelter of a steep

forward bank, surgeons were working over shrieking, moaning wounded. They lay packed in rows, heads high, feet toward the water. The slope was slick with blood. It spread out brackish from the shoreline, was caught and curled away in streamers by the current.

Andy took one look and kept his face turned aside, as Roosevelt hurried his men past the scene.

The Sixth and Ninth cavalry were already in skirmish line and shooting, the Tenth just deploying. The Rough Riders passed behind them, with the First and Third scuttling along in tow, and began to form on the right. Andy heard a shout in his ear and felt a back-slap as Oscar Karns ran by.

The Rough Riders got down and began crawling through the brush, but they had not gone far enough before deploying, and soon were overtaking and mingling with Regulars of the Ninth. Andy crept forward between a Negro cavalryman and a Cuban scout. The noise and confusion about him had become inhuman, phantasmal, and his body moved independently of his mind, a whirling blank of thoughts and decisions.

The angle of slope increased, and brush thinned. Out in front men were creeping, sliding through tall, brown grass. A heavy barbed wire fence extended all along the foreground. Kettle Hill, huge and flat-topped, bulged out of the incline beyond, its ranch buildings and breastworks a-burst with reports and flashes. There was a barren strip of a hundred feet between the last bushes and the grass. The Negro trooper, some feet in advance, started across. He used both his arms and his legs, his body pressed tightly to the ground. There was a sickening plunk. The black hand outstretched for a hold on the first grass tufts stiffened in its reach and slipped back. Blood spurted out over the back of his neck and collar. His head twisted slowly over and around, disbelief pathetic and childlike on his broad, shiny face. Then throat muscles twitched and slackened, and white eyeballs rolled upward. Andy slithered past him like a startled eel. He reached the fence. It was tight. The wires were strung thick and so close to the ground that it was impossible to crawl through or under. He tore his hands on barbs tugging at it. Then he lay on his back and tried to kick the damned thing down, but the strands were new and bound to the posts as well as stapled. Failing in that he seized his knife and began sawing wildly. In the midst of his vain struggle the Cuban rose out of the grass at his side with lifted machete. The heavy blade parted the top wire like a fiddle string and thunged on the second. He struck again, and again, and again before he fell. Andy tumbled over what was left. He landed in a heap and stretched out in the grass—lay quivering. He could go no farther for the moment even under stimulus

of the excitement. His heart was nearly bursting from violence of his exertion. Perspiration poured from his body and face. He seemed to be slowly smothering under weight and heat of the thick, sodden uniform. While he gasped back strength, on either side of him comrades were struggling with the fence. A few succeeded in shooting loose some of the wires; others clubbed them down with butts of their rifles. In one manner or another more and more were breaking through into the meadow.

It occurred to Andy that he should be returning enemy fire. He raised on his elbows, but his eyes, smarting with sweat, blurred the sights. The brine of it burned in his lacerated palms gripping the carbine. He shot wildly at random. His hands were hot and shaking; he fumbled, dropped cartridges.

From the left far across the road where the infantry had deployed, din of firing rose to a crescendo accompanied by an uproar of yells and oaths. He looked that way and saw scattered dark figures walking up a slope; hunched over bayoneted rifles they pressed tightly across their chests. Here and there others were rising out of the tall grass. Then came the clear notes of a bugle at hand, and the sun flashed on hosts of bayonets. Men sprang up by scores. About him as in a dream Andy heard commands shouted.

"Form in line! Form in line!"

A color bearer stood up near by and began to unfurl his banner. He fell, and Sergeant Berry caught up the staff and flourished it wide.

"Dress on the Colors!" he bellowed. "Dress on the Colors!" Captain Ayers joined him, signalling with both arms.

On either side men were coming up roughly abreast of Andy. At his back others poured through breaks in the fence. More officers appeared out in front. Roosevelt in the saddle was among them, waving his hat. "To the top!" He rose in his stirrups.

On hands and one foot Andy was starting to rise with those about him. He had a fleeting impression of long rows of familiar Spanish uniforms rising out of hilltop rifle pits for a final volley. Something with the wallop of a blacksnake whip slammed into his thigh, knocking his raised leg backward from under him and his arms ahead so that he plopped down on his belly. He shrieked a curse at a passing trooper, who, he thought, must have slugged him with his rifle butt. The instant spread of numbness over his body held him from trying to get up again. In a great forward arc a front of scattered cavalymen was moving out—weaving, gathering speed. Andy raised his head and watched them go. He saw the Spaniards disappear pell-mell over the crest and after them the Americans, all going toward the main ridge rising across the depression behind Kettle Hill. The

scene swam dizzily. From somewhere in the rear toward the river came the pleasant rattle of Gatling guns. He saw bursts of shells that the battery on El Pozo was hurling into the slopes and ridges which the infantry were trying to over-run.

Why, they're killing our own men, he thought, but his thinking like the view seemed very hazy, unimportant, and far away to Andy, and the hill skyline to drift in his eyesight. He put one hand under him to ease his position and became aware for the first time of the blood gathering there. He weakened in horror. His face dropped forward into the dirt, and he began to vomit.

Andy would have bled to death on the field if Oscar Karns had not seen him fall and gone back to him from the storming of Kettle Hill. He looked as if he were dead when Oscar picked him up and was still in a semi-coma when laid on the ground at the battalion aid station. During his interval there before his turn for examination, his mind struggled to re-assert itself, alternately rising into consciousness then slipping again. His second revival of memory brought back fragments of images—men bending about him and slitting his pants leg, Oscar Karns's face above a canteen pressed to his lips as his head was raised, a winding and winding of white cloth. Then there was no one or anything, only blue sky overhead.

Andy first became fully aware of his surroundings when Oscar came with the doctor, a bald captain who felt his pulse then placed his hands upon Andy's leg. Andy's body convulsed and he heard himself shriek.

"Broken," the doctor said. "I won't unwrap it. Better to splint it outside and send him to regiment." He put a pill far back on Andy's tongue and told him to swallow.

Oscar Karns was one of two men who held Andy while his thigh was bound between flattened sticks. A blanket was slipped under him and laced securely to a pole on each side.

Comparative softness of the litter when he was lifted and the rigidity of his limb seemed almost pleasant to Andy for a moment, but by the time they entered the clearing to regimental center he was clutching the support poles against jolting. Andy raised his head as they set him down and saw the slope spread with wounded waiting before the surgery tent with no shelters in sight. Oscar stood and took one long look. "Regiment hell. He'll die here. We're going right on back to the field hospital on the beach." Sweat dripped off the tip of his nose as he stooped again to the handles at Andy's head, but his assistant bearer stayed sprawled on the ground. "Let's go," said Oscar.

"We'll never get there with him," the other panted. "I can't make it in this heat."

"Get your ass back between those shafts!" Oscar started toward him with huge fist upraised, and the man pulled himself to his feet.

Day was ending and the journey became rougher with darkness. Oscar swore at the other bearer for stumbling and at himself when he stumbled in turn. Andy's hands and arms grew numb from gripping the poles until they no longer had strength to stabilize his body against jars. Surges of pain from his thigh shot all the way down into his toes until they curled, and up into his groins where the muscles knotted. He ceased trying to stifle his groans and let them rise and fall. When they reached the wide trail on back from El Pozo, Oscar gave his staggering companion an interval for breath. "It'll be smoother from here," he told Andy.

Andy rolled his head from side to side. He recognized his location but could not speak. His whole limb was one unendurable cramp of agony which had not diminished when they put him down. The moon began to swim in circles, and he knew his senses were leaving again. At the first movement of hoisting him the dim world went black. He was unconscious when they reached the big hospital tent on the beach; and because he was among the first wounded to arrive, he received quick attention. Oscar stood by while Andy was examined and until he was taken into surgery. Then he left to rejoin his outfit.

Book II
Earth of the World

Part IV Home

Chapter 20

The spirit of Populism ebbed by late summer along with the war. Humanity had been saved again by force. Phil Garwood, back on his land, had returned to "farm the boys" as expressed by neighbors, whose interests were once more chinch bugs and drouths under stimulation of war prices. As a backwash of the fervor of humanitarian propaganda, church drives were organized to increase attendance. The curious-minded, had they looked backward instead of not looking at all, might have discovered the unintelligibility of history.

There had been hullabaloo about political graft and thievery by middlemen, with aroused citizens voting blind on the conflicting issues, cure-alls, and panaceas suddenly poured upon them. Fanatics had forecast revolution. Yet when dust of commotion settled and the Supreme Court had annulled the income tax law, the one national statute enacted from the whole array of Populist demand legislation, the United States was still a unit, still a republic, and the Middlewest still a stronghold of rugged individualism. Also a period of more plentiful living was arriving. In the afar off noise of factory wheels first heard was a thunderous era of mass production.

The Populist movement had broadened state strictures into regional unification. Henceforth the Midwest must be reckoned with in national politics as an agricultural bloc. Yet the region was too small to win elections alone, and even Populism could not unite the Republican Middlewest and Democratic South against policies stimulating to manufacturing and impeditive to agriculture. Time had not yet healed the sabre cuts between pro-slavery rebels and Yankee abolitionists. The soul of Old John Brown was indeed marching on; and in sequel of years, the nation's agrarian foundations crumpled away before encroaching forces of industrial capital. The rural citizen felt it uneasily in an indefinite sense of movement under him, as the nation slid slowly but overwhelmingly toward a new destiny not yet manifest.

Phil got close to the heart of the situation in an interval of review, but proximity of the struggle yet blinded him to its essence. On the warm September day of return he left the boys to finish unloading the last small pieces of furniture and went off in the late afternoon to wander over the farm, inspecting fences and muttering thoughts aloud as had long been his custom when alone in the fields. He had rejected as useless a plea from Governor Leedy to attend a belated special session of the Populist Legislature, and he had in his pocket Andy's letter from a Florida hospital substantiating Roosevelt's denunciation of his own Party's opposition to pure food laws. "We did get spoiled beef in Cuba," Andy had written. "The boys called it embalmed meat, and it must have been the packers' fault because we had to throw away all we got, not just a mishandled shipment. Teddy is no coward. He's a man with the guts to raise hell about it." Roosevelt's back in politics, so it may be ballyhoo, Phil said to himself, but Andy ought to know more about that than I do.

At the house after supper, Phil retreated to the porch steps. The mild twilight was still bright pink in the west from afterglow; and above, the first star glinted as a faint spark. From inside came clatter of dish washing at the kitchen sink. Then the voice of Electra joined the laughter and banter of the boys in the sitting room, all mixed with clicks of rings snapped across the crokinole board; and Maggie slipped out to Phil on the steps, absorbed in his reflections. By and by the house, too, grew still.

Maggie stirred at his side. "They've gone to bed early without the boys ending their game in a quarrel for once. I guess they were tired out from the moving. We got all straightened up except for curtains."

Phil only nodded.

Before them roofs of barn and other buildings stood in dim, familiar outlines against sky.

"Are you unhappy to be back?" Maggie asked timidly.

"No, not particularly. Why?"

"You were fidgety all day and now so quiet. Doesn't it seem like home?"

"I've missed the noise of Jeremy Hendricks charging around swearing at his family, and it's getting late for them to start."

"Don't say those things."

"All right, but he knows better how to raise chickens and pigs than his children." Phil leaned back and put his pipe into his pocket. "The fact is I've been trying to figure what all the fuss has been about. Democrats wanted free silver and Republicans didn't, and no doubt the Republicans have men just as good and wise as the Democrats. As for us Populists—" He grinned wryly, pinching at his mustache. "We seem to

have been running about shouting for everything without much idea of how to get any of it! I guess the whole country just outgrew its pants."

Maggie sat forward clasping her hands over her distended abdomen and changed the subject. "Electra wanted to give up her contract to teach school and stay home to help with my work because of the baby coming."

"Yes?"

"I told her it wouldn't do. I'm feeling better now with my medicine, was just sort of run down like Doctor MacGregor says; and I told her we could do without her week-days for the few I'll be down."

"That was right."

Maggie regarded the dark, mysterious silhouette of her man. "Ezra Karns was over this afternoon to see if we would donate to help build a church. That was while you were out walking."

"I knew he was going around."

"He said nobody had refused so far except John Freeman, and he's one of those atheists."

"No, Democrat John is just peculiar," Phil said. "He used to go hunting with Andy and me in early days before he married. Best shot I ever saw. John read a lot—borrowed my books. He had no use for preachers, and he hasn't been steady for work, but I've never heard him deny God. And you can't say he ever failed to pay an honest debt."

Maggie frowned into the darkness. "Ezra says they want to start building after fall crops are in. Everybody is going to help carpenter so they can all feel a share in it, he said. They're going to build a parsonage too so we can have a preacher live here."

"If that many folks work that long together, they'll be in a squabble before they're done," Phil said. "They're already divided over what denomination to have."

"Oh, I don't think they'll quarrel," Maggie said. "Dean York has offered the biggest donation yet, and Andy sent one too."

"Is that so!"

"It's not so strange. People often change their thinking about such things as they grow old, and Dean York is a good man."

"The best. I'm surprised about Andy. He never went to church."

"Maybe the terrible things he saw and coming so close to dying changed him," Maggie said. "Emma will sure be glad when he's home."

"They need him," Phil said, "as poorly as Uncle Dean is. I wonder if that cancer he was operated on for isn't coming back. I mentioned it to Doc MacGregor, and he doubted if a genuine cancer could be cured. You never heard Emma say?"

"No. Seems she never cared to talk about it, and I didn't like to ask. She told me Andy was going to be all right."

"Jim said the same thing," Phil said, "that his wound had quit breaking open and healed, and the army had doctored all the malaria out of him. I wished after he got shot I had answered his letters differently from the start, but he made me so damned mad running away!"

"Since Andy's in favor of the church, don't you think we could afford to give something?" Maggie asked. "We've been doing pretty well."

"Yes, a good crop and we'll be in the clear. I wouldn't mind donating if they didn't keep after you once you start. Give, give, give. You know how it would be! If they didn't act as if the church belonged to a special few of them, I wouldn't care."

"It isn't right to talk that way about church, Phillip, when God gave His own Son to be crucified."

"What's the difference between saying and knowing it. Christ did no more than some others. Socrates gave his life too."

Maggie knew the futility of arguing religion with Phil. It made her fearful just to hear him speak of Jesus as a natural man. "It's for the good of the whole neighborhood," she said. "The children ought to have a place to go regular and learn about the Bible."

"The Scripture lessons are fine," Phil said.

Maggie watched him light his pipe and knew he was considering her suggestions. She left him to his silence and waited.

After puffing a while he stirred. "I'll find out what Uncle Dean has in mind and go to the next meeting with him to see what folks have to say. I'd like to see them get along together."

The crowd was gathered at the school house when Phil and Dean York arrived. Ezra Karns met them at the door and shook hands. "Dean told me this morning he was bringing you," he said to Phil. "Come up by us directors. I want all the folks to hear what you men have to say."

It was the first time for Phil inside the new school building. As they walked up the broad center aisle he gazed over the forward-tapering rows of modern desks, adjustable for height, and took note of wide windows for lighting, and ceiling and walls properly painted against glare. For one stride their heavy shoes clattered together upon the metal of the big, round furnace grate. Karns took them to a pair of front seats.

Phil saw ink stains on the slanted, varnished desk surface where he rested his arm, and already a deep set of blackened initials. He smiled in rueful indulgence, at the same time wondering what mild punishment the child might have drawn. He slid an exploring hand into the book

compartment, then looked again about the pleasant room, oblivious to faces. There were built-in book shelves, all stocked, and a thick map case up front. It had been a long fight for better schools, begun back in his lost race for County Commissioner. My agitation did help get this, he thought, and then he saw Dean York watching and reading his expression. The seamed face nodded and smiled, and Phil felt warm inside.

When Karns asked him first to speak, introducing him as "our former Chairman of the State Board of Education," Phil only half rose and reaching forward placed his hand on the back of York's seat.

"My Uncle Dean will talk for both of us."

The old man stood up. He was still active, but in the past year the skin about his cheeks and throat had grown slack and lost its bloom. His bald head glistened pink and blue-veined. Back of his ears around his neck a fringe of hair remained; and it curled upward, now entirely snow white. He began speaking slowly and distinctly.

"We all owe something to our community, me and mine even more than some of you. My boy, Andrew, held office by your choice and drew salary from your taxes. He has written me a great deal about the new church and asking me to come tonight. He'll be back himself before long."

He was interrupted by a rise of hand clapping, and a smile spread over Dean's face. "Thank you," he said. "I am going to say just what he wants me to say and as he would want it said, honestly and regardless."

"It seems to us both that quarreling in and between our churches, more than any place else, has kept us from living together as good neighbors. No one can blame religion for that, because there is nothing religious about it. We quarrel in our Granges and lyceums, too, but they come and go in favor, while the country church always stays. For that reason it has been the scene for most of our quarrels, when it should have joined us into the warmest cooperation. What I am trying to say is that everytime we've organized we've broken up, until it seems that jealousy and intolerance move us instead of Christianity. If that is to happen again, we'd do better to all go home right now and give up having any church."

The room grew still. Phil looked from Dean over his listeners where persons fidgeted at the last sentence.

"I haven't been a church goer," Dean continued, "because of such quarreling. I'm getting too old to organize and Andy isn't here, but we want to help you interest young folks in the things Jesus taught. I don't believe He would consider Presbyterians better than Methodists, or Methodists better than Baptists, or Baptists better than other denominations. They all look like people to me. Yet I know that some of you have

preferences strong enough for trouble. We are ready, Andrew and I, to give two hundred dollars to the building fund providing—" Dean paused holding up a forefinger. "Providing it be made strictly open-sectarian!"

Phil saw a stir and lifting of heads. Dean spoke on with conviction.

"That is what Andrew asks, a community chapel like they have in the army that people of all faiths can use and feel at home in. Even if they be Roman Catholic or Jewish it shall not be denied them. I know that none of you here are either, and I doubt that any of either will ever use our building for synagogue or cathedral; but if on some occasion they did need to hold service in it, they should be welcomed."

Folks peered at elbow neighbors after Dean sat down and began craning necks to see the reactions in remote faces. From the front row Henri Loubet stretched upward in his seat, turning his head completely to look with blinking, black eyes at everyone behind him. Nobody seemed eager to take the floor.

Phil half rose again. "I will match Uncle Dean's contributions on the same conditions."

Still there was no applause. Phil saw Bill Addison whisper behind his hand to Joel Palmer, who nudged his neighbor and passed word along, but Ezra Karns arose at his desk in command before any spreading murmur could take audible form.

"I've no doubt Mr. York's proposal seems radical to some," Ezra said. "For a moment it startled me too, but on second thought I wonder if it may not be startling from common sense? It's a big question, but it has been put to us square. As chairman I say let's go home and sleep on it before we try to decide. Meeting adjourned."

Dean took Phil outside at once as people began to get to their feet. "I don't want to be on hand and drawn into arguments," he said.

"Neither do I," Phil said, "but I do wonder what that whisper was Bill Addison started back there?"

"Maybe he told them my grandmother was Catholic, and I had leanings."

Phil laughed. "It'll be a marvel to me if they don't end up in a quarrel on the question right tonight, in spite of what Ez Karns told them. He surprised me."

In the buggy and settled, Dean backed his mare and turned around. "I talked it over with him this morning," he said, "so he'd know how to handle it. You got to arrange for folks to do their thinking before they take their stand, because afterwards they're too stubborn to change. Ez likes the idea himself, and where the almighty dollar is concerned besides

—you know him. He's shrewd, and he'll give them plenty of time. If it takes him months of going around talking to folks, Ez has the patience to do it. He'll manage it if anybody could."

Chapter 21

During Christmas Holidays Dr. MacGregor paid his call to the Garwoods and brought still another son into the life of the household; and as if from a sixth sense for complications, MacGregor had Irene Barker with him.

It was with greatest difficulty that this third child was born. He was an overdue baby, large and lodged crosswise and had to be turned. Hemorrhage followed. Nothing except swift action by MacGregor prevented loss of both mother and child.

Maggie's screams sent Electra, the only one of the children allowed to remain home, fleeing in horror out into the cold, starlit night. While Mrs. Barker and Phil held the patient fast under sharp orders, while blood flowed, soaking bed sheets, MacGregor with almost ruffian desperation went after the child with forceps. In the kitchen afterwards, still pale himself and with his hands now trembling as he washed them, he expressed himself in five words: "It had to be done."

Even with the baby delivered and the hemorrhage packed he stayed all of the night and into the next day, fearful of complications.

Maggie slept several hours under sedative. She awakened slowly. She was lying with head turned sidewise and became aware first of morning sunlight around edges of green window blind across the room. Resting in a state dulled to half consciousness it seemed to her altogether too much of a problem to stir; she let her eyes close out sight of the blurred, half-real world. When she looked again minutes later through drooping lids she saw first a long, white apron and a chair beside the bed and then above them both the face of Irene Barker. In the seconds thereafter the succession of events came rushing back to her as a nightmare. Maggie cried out.

Mrs. Barker moved quickly, and her hand went to Maggie's brow, restraining her from lifting her head. "Everything is all right."

Maggie moved her arms empty at her sides. "My baby?"

"He's sleeping."

Maggie saw Phil and MacGregor approaching the bed, drawn to the room by her outcry. Phil bent and put his lips to her forehead. "Mom—

I—Thank God!" He whispered the words fiercely, the muscles working in his face.

A terrible fear struck Maggie. "The baby—"

"All right, fine."

Desperately her eyes clung to his. "You aren't hiding—"

"No, no," MacGregor said. He put his hands to her shoulders and shook her just a little. "Listen to me! You have your biggest, strongest boy."

Maggie relaxed and lay very still. "No girl." The corners of her mouth quivered. She squeezed shut her eyes, but a tear ran down the side of her nose. "I don't want another boy."

Mrs. Barker, standing near Phil, inclined her head toward him and whispered, "Don't mind what she said. It's the sedative."

MacGregor nodded in agreement to Phil. His fingers found Maggie's wrist under the quilts. After a moment he nodded reassurance to Maggie. "You're better. You can see him now."

Electra had entered the room after the rest and stood silent in the background. It was she who brought the swaddled infant from the cradle and held his uncovered face above Maggie, who did not stir.

"Can you see him good?"

Phil stepped to the window and drew aside the shade, flooding the room with light.

Maggie saw the blue eyes of her stepdaughter looking wistfully at her. "He's awfully nice," Electra said. She lowered the baby toward Maggie's lips, and she began sobbing and kissing him. The baby screwed up his face and started to squall.

"Is he sick?" Maggie cried.

MacGregor laughed. "That little guy wants his dinner. That's all the matter with him." He folded back the covers. Gently with Mrs. Barker he turned Maggie on her side to nurse the baby more easily.

Maggie kissed him again as soon as he was laid on her arm. "I wouldn't have any other one!"

"I didn't think so," MacGregor said. "As soon as he's fed, I want you both to go right back to sleep. Mrs. Barker will be here for anything you need, and I'll see you again tomorrow."

When MacGregor returned next day and had examined Maggie, he motioned Mrs. Barker from the room. He pulled up a chair beside the bed and sat down, interlacing fingers over his fat little paunch. For a moment he chatted and then became serious.

"You're a good deal weaker than you think you are," he told her, "and you're going to stay weak for some time."

Maggie's eyes widened quickly. "Am I in danger, Doctor?"

"No, not any more. You're going to get well, but it will be slow, and I want Mrs. Barker to stay for a week or longer."

Maggie hesitated. She remembered Hal Barker stopping by to see if his mother needed anything and the view through the doorway of him talking with Electra and nervously running his fingers through his hair. "My daughter will be here to take care of me till after New Year's."

"Electra is all right, but you need someone who has done nursing and to see that you take your medicines and eat the right things. Even after you're up, you'll have to be careful for quite a while. Another baby too soon wouldn't be good for you."

MacGregor leaned back and stretched his short legs, studying Maggie with mild blue eyes. "You have a nice size family, Mrs. Garwood. If you want me to, I'll tell you how not to have more."

Maggie peered at him. "Doctor—would it be right to do—that?"

"I don't know. Is it right either to bring children into the world unless they are wanted?"

"I—don't know," she said.

Maggie was avoiding his gaze, and MacGregor reached out and patted her hand. "Think it over and decide with your husband. I'll be stopping in to see you every day or so."

When Maggie confided to Phil, he agreed at once with MacGregor. "I wouldn't take a million for any of our children," he said, "but think how much more we can do for them if we have no more. And Mom, I don't want to see you ever have such a hard time again!"

Maggie put out her hand for his and gratefully accepted his judgment. Both knew MacGregor was defying state law in his offer, and Phil spoke of it. "It would be a good idea to say nothing to anyone about this. We might get Doc into trouble."

Maggie's recovery was gradual as MacGregor had predicted. In a month she was up and about, starting the morning fires again, but when she slipped out in the early dawn after a snow to shovel a path to the well, five minutes had her panting breathless. Phil came into the kitchen from bed in time to catch her at it and rushed out and took the shovel away from her. Maggie's hands were trembly, and her face under her scarf was pale and drenched with sweat.

"Just what the doctor told you not to do! Are you trying to kill yourself?" He took her by the shoulders and shook her a little, then guided her forcibly into the house and to a chair close beside the stove where the oven threw out heat. "You sit there and don't let me see you even

stand up until I have breakfast on the table! And don't ever go out into that snow again."

"I'm all right," Maggie said.

"You're not all right. You haven't caught all your breath yet." He bent and rubbed her icy hands until they felt warm. Maggie tickled his palm with her finger tips when he finished and laid the back side of his hand to her forehead. "Now look here! I meant what I said about you staying inside," Phil told her.

"All right."

He straightened. The severity in his face changed into a reluctant half smile, and he shook his head. "Sometimes I think you will never learn to rest."

To worsen the family situation, Clarence and Shannon came down with chicken pox. They were kept from school while the rash was noticeable for fear of quarantine. Electra had had the disease and could go on teaching, but the baby caught it from the boys and became cranky. Then Maggie caught it from him, and MacGregor sent her back to bed when a back ache developed. He prescribed antiphlogistic poultices, and Phil had to arise at two A.M. to renew the compress on schedule.

Maggie saw how tired his face was when he came in and turned up the lamp on the dresser the second night. "I'm an awful bother," she said.

Phil felt her forehead for fever. It was not hot, and he strayed his fingers on over her hair. "Don't think that for a minute, Mom."

His dark eyes were kinder on her than Maggie had ever seen them, and she blinked to keep from crying. "It seems like all our troubles had to come at once," she said.

"Maybe they'll all end at once and be over with," he told her.

In the worry of family responsibilities, Phil lost touch with community affairs, not even finding time to follow Bryan's political decline or Theodore Roosevelt's rise as Governor of New York, although the establishment of rural mail service had that autumn begun delivery of newspapers to his dooryard.

Maggie was up again to sit at the table with the family the evening Electra came back from teaching at West Bend district to see her brothers in the Easter box-supper program of the home school. Phil had built a roaring fire in the dining room heater for the occasion, and opened the big double doors to the adjoining sitting room. It made mealtime seem festive even to the hungry boys to have all chairs filled. Over white cloth and dishes hung smells of the first fried chicken and hot biscuits they had had in many days; and Shannon was in a zenith of glee because sis-

ter's beau was coming to take her to the box-supper. Maggie and Phil knew it was Hal Barker but had not enlightened the boys.

"I'm gonna tell all the guys when the auctioneer holds up Sis's box," Shannon announced loudly, "and we'll get together and bid the price up to five dollars on her feller, whoever he is!"

"Hush," Phil said. "You don't even know what her box looks like."

"I'll bet I find it, wherever she's got it hid! Maybe we'll run it to *ten* dollars."

"You don't have that much money," Maggie said.

"Clair and I and some of the other kids together do. Don't we, Clair?"

Clarence had his mouth too full of potatoes and gravy to more than nod, and before he could swallow Shannon went on. "We don't want to buy her old box, just make her feller pay high as we can for it. Who is he, Sis?"

Electra pretended not to be hearing him.

"Hush up, I told you," Phil said again. "Let somebody else have a chance to talk."

"Do you think he'd give ten dollars to keep some other guy from sitting side of you and eating with you, Sis?"

"Sure he will," Clarence said, "to find out if she's a good cook."

"Look at her blush!" Shannon said. "Sister loves her feller, sister loves her feller."

Maggie looked from the crimson in Electra's face uncertainly to Phil. She had thought several times of bringing up with him the question of Hal's parentage. Phil was grinning happily but also reached over and emphasized his previous demand for quiet with a mild thump on Shannon's head. "Quit pestering her."

Shannon bit his chicken drumstick and wrinkled his freckled nose at Electra.

"I expect the crowd will be late gathering because of the church meeting," she remarked, in an effort to get away from Shannon's subject. "I don't see why they had to use the Friday of Miss Marshall's program to decide what kind of church to have. They're together every Sunday anyway, and tonight they couldn't even use the schoolhouse."

Phil looked up sharply. "What was that they were going to do?"

"They're going to meet at Ezra Karns's to vote whether to have it Methodist or Presbyterian. I wish they could have done like you and Mr. York wanted and stopped quarreling."

"Well, they took my money!"

"I thought they had decided not to."

"Ez did say that once; then he came back yesterday to tell me he'd got enough people to agree, and I gave him the check."

"They got a right to make it M-M-Methodist or whatever a majority wants," Clarence spoke up. "That's the way this country is run."

Phil turned on him. "Don't be a fool all your life! You heard Electra say they were fighting already."

"Oh now, Phillip, let's not cause trouble," Maggie protested alarmed by anger rising in Phil's face. "It doesn't make any difference."

"It does too—a hell of a difference. I paid my money to put an end to their rowing, and by God, I'm going to!" He shoved back his plate with food still on it and went for his bedroom closet and overcoat. "I'm going to get Andy and Uncle Dean. We'll see about this!"

Teams and vehicles were tied in the yard when Phil arrived with the Yorks at Karns's. There was light from all downstairs windows of the big house, where whole families waited inside to be taken on to the box-supper. Ezra as Chairman and Secretary Henri Loubet were at the sitting room table droning off ballots to Bill Addison before the men crowded along the walls.

"Methodist."

"Check."

"Presbyterian."

"Check."

All three glanced up at the sudden stir with the opening of the front door. "Do we get to vote in this meeting?"

Ezra halted on the "O" of Methodist. His face reddened and hands stiffened as if to clutch and defend the cigar box containing ballots. "Yes—certainly. Why, of course, Brother Garwood!"

Henri made a flurry to provide slips of paper.

"I'll call mine," Phil said. "Mohammedan!"

"Ch—check!" stammered Addison.

Karns's Adam's apple bobbed hard as he swallowed.

"You heard the vote," Andy prodded. "We're all three Moslems this evening."

Ezra opened his mouth. "I—we—were deciding—"

"I know. We came to get our money if you're going through with this," Dean York said.

"Let's leave it to a majority to decide what they want."

"Not for me, they won't," Phil interrupted. "No denomination; those were the terms of my contribution."

"It looks like the opinion of a whole neighborhood is better than yours," Loubet said.

"All right. Just give me back my money, and you can make it any damn kind of church you please."

"You're speaking of a House of God," Bill Addison said.

"The Lord knows how to deal with infidels!" someone shouted.

Joel Palmer pressed forward. "You only came to start a rumpus," he screamed at his brother-in-law. "Just because you've held state office you think you can come back and tell us how to run *our* church!"

"Then give back our checks and keep it *your* church."

Before Joel could reply further, Henri Loubet rose out of his chair, voice and hands lifting together in triumph. "They can't get it back. Ezra's already cashed the checks and bought lumber!"

Silence dropped upon the room. Loubet stared in one direction and another, then sank down dazed with blood rushing into his face from his blunder of disclosure.

Dean York was first to speak. "Did you do that, Ez?"

Karns sat nailed to his chair, red to the top of his bald scalp. He kept his gaze fixed upon the table surface between his hands. Andy, still thin and limping slightly, started moving almost solemnly toward him with fists clinched. "If you have—"

Dean placed a restraining hand on his son's arm and looked slowly around over the crowd. "I don't know who else of you had a part in this, and I believe I'd rather I never knew. I just want to wash my hands of the whole low-down business." He took a long breath and turned to Phil. "Let's go home."

Phil hesitated, looked again toward Karns. "No. He doesn't get off that easy." Phil stepped up to the table where Ezra sat, and his voice was menacing in clarity. "I want everybody to hear you say it. Did you do that!"

Ez raised his face and his goatee was trembling. "I tried to talk to people," he said. "I tried my best to get a community chapel! That's what I wanted too. Folks just wouldn't have it."

"So then you decided to take our money anyhow," Phil said. "You told me straight out yesterday it would be a community chapel when you knew it wouldn't. You lied, Ezra Karns, and I'm telling you here to your face, if you want to make something of it!"

"It—it was for a good cause," Ezra quavered.

"It's stolen money just the same, and I never want to look inside the church you build with it!"

Phil turned on his heels and stalked out of the again silent room be-

tween Dean and Andy. They had hardly reached the yard when clash of voices rose from within.

"We should never have made the mistake of trusting Karns," said Phil.

"I think Ez was telling the truth that he tried hard," Dean said.

"It was still crooked, no matter how it's looked at."

At Phil's carriage, the old man climbed silently to the seat and pulled the robe over his lap while the other two untied the horses. He listened to the violence of dispute they had left behind until Phil and Andy were in on either side of him. Then he shook his head. "If Heaven has to be fenced into acre plots for the angels to get along, I'd rather go below where there is more room."

Before Phil had his team turned the front door of the house opened, and Bruno Haeckel emerged, herding in front of him his three tow-headed children and Mrs. Haeckel. The Dutchman waddled in his indignation and directed a flow of German upon his reluctant Frau. He half halted in passing, waving his hands for a lapse into English. "I Lutheran. Karns want that I change, und I say yes. I vote Methodist for him. I gif money. But I meet not mit liars!"

"That's one," said Andy as they drove away. "A lot more will walk out, and they'll still be quarreling at the box-supper. Ez and Henri will end up with a church house but only half a congregation."

"I'm staying home since this happened," Phil said. "I'm on the school board, and I don't want to drag it into the school."

"I wouldn't go either if I didn't have to."

"He's rushing the new schoolma'am," Dean said to Phil, and then he turned to Andy. "It could spoil her whole term for her."

"I'm not going to get into argument over there," Andy said. "The others may, but they'll do it without me."

Phil snapped his whip sharply over the backs of the horses and they sprang forward. "There's only one way to get along with people in this neighborhood," he said shortly. "Have nothing to do with them, and that's the way I'm going to live from now on."

In spite of Phil's vow and Maggie's entreaties he was not able to withdraw from the controversy. Jeremy Hendricks made a special trip to tell Phil that after he left the church meeting, Henri Loubet had said Shannon was causing trouble at school and had refused to take a whipping because Phil was on the board.

"He said," added Hendricks, happily, "that the only way you managed to get on the board was by getting appointed to fill Dale Coughlin's

place when he moved from the district, that you could never be elected to anything!"

"You can tell that Frenchman and everyone else I was not at the school meeting and didn't even know I had been appointed till afterwards," Phil said. "What's more you can tell them if my children get into cussedness at school, they'll take what's coming to them there, or I'll give it to them myself when they get home!"

Then, as soon as the caller had left, Phil shouted for Shannon. The boy was in the chicken house where Maggie had sent him to kerosene mites and bedbugs, and he was so absorbed in his task that he did not hear the calls. Shannon made a war game of that job by cautiously laying hold of each roosting bar, lifting it quickly from its notch, and applying a swift, deadly squirt from his oilcan directly into the mass of dazed insects scurrying for new cover. They did not crawl far after their bath. They stretched upward on their legs as far as they could rise and squirmed over on their backs, feet writhing in the air.

His father found him and put an abrupt halt to the slaughter, demanding a straightforward account of the school incident. "And you had just as well tell the truth, because I'm going to see the teacher myself tomorrow!"

Shannon looked down his snub nose and rubbed it with a smelly fist, trying hard to appear sorry. "I got a lickin' for fighting Tommy Loubet. I put a tack in his seat. But I didn't fight back at Miss Marshall; she just had a little switch. It was Tommy that didn't want to take his."

"Why didn't you tell me about this?"

"'Cause you always said we'd get another one when we got home!"

"You come with me," Phil said, and waltzed him away by the arm.

Jim York was school board treasurer, and Phil stopped early for him next morning to take him along to the schoolhouse. "I want to get it over before any kids arrive to stand and listen," Phil said.

"That's right," Jim said. "There's been too many stories carried home already."

Vivian Marshall came to the door at their knock. Phil saw her eyebrows lift and her small mouth stiffen as she looked from one to the other of the two board members confronting her. "Come in," she said. The room was only beginning to lose chill from the fire she had built, and she led them to the furnace grate where warm air flowed upward. She put down the cloth with which she had been dusting desks, till now wadded in one little fist, and drew herself up small and straight. Her face was as round and tight as the flat teacher's bun of black hair low on the back of her head, and

Phil saw something which reminded him of spear tips in her gray eyes. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

Jim York shifted his weight back and forth and looked at Phil.

"First, I want to ask about Shannon," Phil said.

Miss Marshall's gaze leveled upon him. "I switched your boy for putting a tack in a seat and fighting!"

Phil grinned. "I didn't come to complain. Did Shannon talk back to you or anything?" He saw the spear points disappear from her eyes.

"Oh, no, but I'm not sure the rascal didn't feel it was worth what he got."

Jim York looked from teacher to Phil and back again, chuckled and shook his head. "I guess boys haven't changed since I was a kid. As I remember, when me and Andy couldn't study and behave ourselves we usually got extra attention after school."

Vivian Marshall laughed, and an unsuspected dimple appeared in one cheek. "Boys have no monopoly on that, Mr. York. I have been on the receiving end too."

"The thing is that there are stories going around of my children acting up in school," Phil said, "and I want to get to the bottom of it."

"They haven't any more than I just told you. Clarence is no problem; he's almost too quiet. There would have been no trouble if parents hadn't started quarreling about their church. The tack business was all over weeks ago."

"Well, if Shannon gets into more deviltry, you straighten him out right," Phil told her.

"That goes for my girls too, Miss Marshall, and everybody else's kids," Jim York said. "We hired you to run this school."

"We didn't bring Ez Karns because you can't trust him," Phil said, "but we wanted to let you know where the two of us stood. You're teaching a good school, and you don't need knuckle to anybody." He looked at her narrowly. "I guess you wouldn't anyway!"

Vivian Marshall flushed, but laughed with them. "I'm sorry I misunderstood when I saw you at the door; but there have been so many people meddling lately. I should have remembered your part in state aid to education."

"We don't blame you at all," Phil said.

"Just the same, letting my temper rise wasn't very gracious or the best way to handle such things."

The men began buttoning their coats. "Maybe not always the best way, but it's one way," Jim said.

"Thank you for calling," she told them.

Outside at the buggy, Jim looked at Phil and chuckled. "She's spunky enough to tell somebody off if they keep bothering her."

"I hope it's Ez Karns or Loubet," Phil said.

The half-past-eight bell began ringing as they drove away, and Jim took out a big silver watch from his overalls breast pocket. "Right on time to the minute," he said. "Do you suppose she can ever teach Andy to be punctual?"

"Are they that serious?" Phil asked.

"It looks so to me. It seems odd—her capable and determined a little like a man, not a bit pretty." Jim squinted his eyes and halfway smiled. "She came to get a coal order signed soon after Andy got home. You know how peaked and quiet he was, and he was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed when we went inside. The second he saw her he jerked up and stared, and his face turned kind of pale and strange. They didn't talk after I introduced them, but he kept looking at her. Mary started to josh him as soon as she'd gone, told him he acted like he'd seen a ghost. 'I did,' he said, 'right out of the tent hospital at Siboney.—A ghost turned young.' And then he told us how she looked a lot like that Red Cross woman, Clara Barton. She helped take care of Andy in Cuba, you know."

"No," Phil said, "I didn't know."

"Yeah, and I guess those women must have been about like angels to the wounded men. Anyway, seeing that little Marshall gal sure snapped him out of something."

"She is striking," Phil said. "I wouldn't have taken my appointment if I had known it would cause her trouble."

"It didn't. Ez Karns had already stirred it up trying to keep his school taxes down. Folks with kids wouldn't stand for that. It's why they picked you."

Another bell from the neighboring district had joined the one behind them, and then from the very distant right came faintly the tones of a third. They listened to them a couple of minutes. "It's a double damned shame that people can't leave their spites out of our schools at least," Phil said.

Chapter 22

Through spring the feuding continued; and following the school election while Phil and Jim were signing up Vivian Marshall again at a raise, over howls from Ezra Karns, young Hal Barker encountered another problem over a different school situation. He was driving Electra home from

the West Bend district as he had every Friday afternoon since shortly after her term began. It was a long trip, but he let his span of ponies choose their gait, a walk genial enough for them to snatch bites from prairie grass which grew up tall and rich to the edges of smooth-worn wagon ruts.

One of the ponies got hold into a tougher clump and paused, twisting and tugging at it until the doubletree on the on-moving buggy bumped his hind legs. He jumped from the impact, clamped jaws tearing off long stems almost at the roots. The buggy lurched a little.

Hal chuckled. "That's like a cow with grass all around her reaching through the fence!"

Electra watched tufts sticking out on either side of the bridle bit gradually disappear inward with the pony's munching. "He thinks it's good, doesn't he?"

"I like to work with livestock, especially horses." Hal's voice grew resonant. "I like to feed them, to see them grow fat and frisky and shiny."

Electra concurred softly. "They always seem so happy romping in the pastures. Only they get lazy from too much play, and then don't want to work at all, just like people."

Hal nodded and breathed deeply, stretching his shoulders. In the warm sunshine the countryside everywhere was fresh and inwardly stirring; and the breathing, eternal soul of the Great Earth crept into both their hearts.

When Hal turned to Electra, she saw in his face a deep struggle on the brink of breaking forth in words, and her limbs grew suddenly warm and weak. No speech came to him, however. He shifted his gaze from her and ran his fingers trembling up through his hair under his hat. More quietly he took out his pipe and filled it, but his hands were still unsteady with the match in cupping flame to bowl. After that they kept looking about them, still drinking in of the renewed life, but without meeting each other's eyes. They rode sitting properly apart as they always had, these two, yet wistfully and fearfully man and maid—until at last a light, bright thought opened before Hal.

"Let's go to the town dance tonight! We'll have supper at Mother's, and you can call your folks from there."

"Oh, but I mustn't," Electra said. "Teachers can't dance. Some people of the district might see me."

"Let 'em see, the old fogies! School is out now."

"They might change their minds about my contract for next year. It isn't signed yet, only promised."

"I wish they would! I—"

"Hal!"

"Well, I do! They've spoiled our fun long enough. A teacher can't do this and can't do that, but other people do."

"I can't help it."

"All right, I'm sorry. Of course I want you to have your job to teach and everything—if you care so much what people think."

"You have to care," Electra said.

Hal shook the lines, putting the ponies into a trot, and gave all his attention to driving.

They had never quarreled, and it had never occurred to Electra what she would do if they ever did quarrel. Now the desolate thought had been thrust before her, and all fullness of the moments before had been emptied out. She rode by his side wordless and distressed.

In the silence above jiggling whirl of the buggy wheels and clip clop of the ponies' hoofs, she could sense his displeasure growing and with it felt indignation of her own for the intolerances toward her profession.

At the crossroads midway between the Garwood home and town, Hal stopped the team, ready to turn in either direction. "Are you going to the dance with me or not?"

"I'll—go."

For a moment Hal sat and looked at the lines in his hands. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded," he told her. "It's been wonderful all winter being with you. If you daren't dance, it's all right."

Inexplicably Electra felt a rush of blood to her cheeks at his apology. "It's not all right. What you said about teachers is true." Hal stared at her, for in her vehemence her foot stamped the buggy floor. "If I can't even have my own vacations for myself, to heck with their school!"

Hal ducked in mock terror, a grin breaking across his tanned face. "Whew! I'll bet your pupils toe the mark when you get mad."

All evening dancing, Hal was gay as a boy as they swung, crossed and promenaded to the fiddles, and Electra became almost frivolous—her sweet, tranquil propriety whisked away with the misgivings she had thrown aside. She frolicked through sets under discovery of this new, untapped animation within her.

"I don't think anyone noticed me after all," she said, still a bit breathless as they went down stairs from the last whirling waltz.

Hal laughed. "Careful there. You're letting the schoolma'am peek through again." He slid his clasp on her arm down and curled it around her fingers as they reached the sidewalk and swung her hand high with a whoop. For a few paces they ran. "Electra, I didn't know you ever let go and played like this! I mean—well—"

"I don't—er didn't," she came back, interrupting. "I mean I didn't know I could either—or something!"

They stopped, searching into each other's faces under the street lamp at the enigmatic nature of their outbursts. Then they broke into hilarious laughter.

Behind them the other couples were now pouring into the street, and Hal glanced back. "Shall we eat a bite? We can beat the crowd to the restaurant."

"No." Electra jerked her hand from his and sprang away. "I'll race you to the buggy." Hal overtook her turning the corner, and they almost ran into staggering, heavy-faced Oscar Karns, who stared after them.

Electra winced inwardly for Hal. He hurried her on from behind with hands under her shoulders, pushing her faster and faster until she was run almost off her feet. At the buggy he hoisted her on in. "Isn't it fun to be crazy!" he said, but his voice did not now sound hearty and he did not look at her.

He wrapped her in one of his mother's bright comforters, for night air had settled cool and damp with dew, and his arms lingered about her longer than necessary for tucking the folds. Then he hustled around front and untied the hitching reins. Electra felt the squareness of his shoulder as he settled beside her, and let her own press boldly back as stiffly he backed the team. Presently her head followed suit. She was surprised and alarmed at her daring. Her heart pumped wildly, but she did not move away.

The ponies were eager for the road, and Hal let them out until their surplus energy wore off. When they slowed to a lagging trot, he began to talk, awkwardly and earnestly.

"Mother wants me to open a merchandise store adjoining her laundry. She says I'd get trade from her customers as it's handy to the livery stable. I know she is right that we could make money, but I can't do it. I believe you can understand, but Mother doesn't. I don't want to go dead behind a counter and whittle away my days on the porch. I want to farm, to plant crops with my own hands and see them grow and ripen, not just handle dead stuff other people have raised. I want to work with things alive, feel the wind and sun. I've hired out to farmers to help me learn, and in another year or two I'll have saved up money enough to rent a place and start for myself."

Electra listened with a feeling he was telling her this for a purpose, also what that purpose was. Finished and still looking straight ahead, he ran his hand repeatedly through his hair. They were nearing her home, and she sat up; and he turned and spoke directly.

"Do you remember when you were little and staying at our place, and that first year we tried to go to school together?" His words came so fast they almost jumbled.

Electra made herself laugh lightly. "I couldn't very well forget with all the fuss. You hit Georgie Brewster in the nose because he said things about me!"

"I'd do it again!" Hal's voice trembled indignantly. "I've never forgotten how people acted! You were the only playmate I ever had. Folks began treating me better as I grew up, but I thought they were still thinking about me—not having a father. Did it—ever bother you?"

"Never a bit. I knew you before I understood about that." She moved farther away so as to look straight at him. "Pa would have skinned us alive if we'd ever mentioned it at home."

"I'm awfully glad," Hal said. His fine voice had cleared. "It has never seemed a sin to me in Mother. She was out here alone, a young working girl, and she gave her love. It was all she had. People used to send preachers to our place to try to make her pray for forgiveness! I always liked your father because he stood up for us. I liked Clarence and Shannon, and used to wish they were older so we could have run around together. I kept away from other boys."

"I didn't go about much with people either," she said. "We never went to church socials, and we moved places so much I didn't get acquainted. It seemed as if I were grown up before high school time."

"I was afraid you were gone for always when you went to Topeka," Hal said.

When they had turned into the farmyard he helped her out and went with her to the steps. There he resolutely took hold of both her hands.

"Electra?"

"Yes."

Bravely in the dim light they drew mutually toward one another. Electra stood submissively against him, at first feebly protesting while he took her in his arms and kissed her until she hid her face away in his coat.

"You knew, didn't you, darling," he whispered through her hair.

Electra shook her head into his shoulder. "I thought maybe. I hoped and hoped, but you never said."

"I was afraid of losing you altogether," he told her. "It was that thing about my father always hanging over me."

Electra stepped apart by reflex, face up and reading his even through darkness. "That was it troubling you when you tried to talk about teachers and the things people think!" she cried.

"Maybe it will always be there between us like a kind of cloud, even when we don't see it," he said. "You ought to know that."

"No, Hal. I had never even thought of it!" Then she was against him again, her cheek pressed to his chest—holding him as tightly as he had held her. It seemed to him that the whole slight length of her was being shaken by force of her heart beats. "Oh, no, Hal, darling!"

When Hal raised his lips from hers, he threw back his head and gazed far off into the lighter gray of the horizon, as if he were seeing something a long way distant.

Chapter 23

Crop yields grew heavier each succeeding summer; and as Electra entered her third term of teaching, now openly wearing Hal's engagement ring, Phil sold his wheat at ninety cents a bushel—the highest price ever received. On a fine bright September afternoon only hours before McKinley's assassination he hauled his last load of the year to Plainsboro.

Andy had finished dumping one ahead of him. He came down the incline from the driveway in a rush, holding his team back hard against momentum of the wagon in order to make the turn into the road. He pulled up at sight of Phil in the line of other teams and wagons waiting to drive onto the scales platform. Across rail sidetracks stood the tall, graceless tower of the elevator, tiers of bins above a pit. It gave forth dust, the rumble of machinery elevating grain, and the heavy hiss of other bushels pouring down a spout into a box car.

"How's yours testing?" Andy shouted.

Phil looked around at the voice. "Tops! Sixty or better."

"It's all part of Republican prosperity," Andy said.

"Republican hell!" Phil called back. "McKinley is a good grandmotherly soul, but he isn't fit to be President. You helped Roosevelt make Cuban headlines to elect them both!"

Andy's laugh rose with that of other waiting farmers. "Teddy's got push all right."

"More push than judgment," said Phil, "but as vice-president he can't do much damage." There was another general chuckle, jovial and loud. Andy waved and slapped the lines across the fat rumps of his horses to start them on.

As soon as he had unloaded, Phil took his stack of tickets to the office for his check and hurried to the bank ahead of closing time. He wanted to pay off the last of his mortgage and have the papers in his pocket. George

Foster shook hands after signing the release. "From now I hope we can pay interest to you instead," he said.

From the bank Phil went to the clothing store and bought for Maggie a new wool coat with red fox neck piece and muff to match. He carefully placed the parcel on the seat beside him and at home slipped it into the house with groceries and empty egg cases and hid it until Shannon and Clarence came home from school. Phil gave the horses each an extra measure of grain after he unharnessed them.

When the family had finished supper and were resting, chairs pushed back from the table, Phil stood up before them, looking very mysterious. "Everybody sit right where he is," he said, and disappeared into the bedroom. He came back with the long, flat cardboard box and laid it across Maggie's knees.

"Mine?" Maggie looked up in surprise at Phil and saw him grinning widely; then she looked at the blank, expectant faces of the boys, waiting for her to open it. She laid aside the lid and folded back the tissue paper and saw first the muff on top, and her breath caught. "Oh! Oh, my!" She snatched it to her face with both hands, turning her cheeks from side to side into the soft fur. Over it, she looked again at Phil and saw his expression of deep pleasure.

"Do you like it?"

"Have you gone silly!" she said, and because she laughed when she said it she knew she was not going to cry.

She gave Clarence the muff and neck piece, and her hands fumbled in the box in her hurry to rise with the coat and try it on. "Dark brown—my favorite color."

Phil held it for her and hitched it to set to her shoulders. Maggie stepped away from him, holding it closed with one hand and smoothing the rich fabric against her body while she looked down the length of one side and then the other.

"It's a perfect fit!" she cried.

"I had it made to order," Phil said. "I took your old one into town last week to measure from."

Shannon had taken the fur neck piece from Clarence and wrapped it about his throat. "Look, Mom. Just what I need inside my hunting coat when I go after jack rabbits!"

"You're not going to get it," she said. "The idea!"

Shannon kept his expression very serious. "Well, it matches my hair nearer than it does yours!"

Phil laughed. "They don't grow red foxes dark as Mom's hair."

Bob had been clamoring for attention from his high chair and not get-

ting it let out a wail. Clarence stepped over and tickled his ears and the back of his neck with the muff until he squealed with glee. Every time the little boy twisted around and reached for the fur, his brother jerked it away.

"Watch he doesn't get hold of it," Maggie said. "His fingers are all gravy." Carefully she folded the coat and repacked the box.

With dishes done and Bob rocked to sleep, Maggie got everything out and looked at it again. "I have to tighten the buttons," she said, "or they'll be dropping off the first time I wear it. They never but half fix anything you buy at the stores."

She sat down to work at it, and Phil looked over his newspaper and winked at the boys playing cards at the table, for Maggie had the furs about her shoulders.

Later when embers had been stirred out in the stove with morning kindling placed ready and they had all gone to bed, he knew she was still thinking about the coat as she lay beside him, for she curled her fingers around his hand.

"It must have cost an awful lot," she whispered.

"It's past time to start forgetting some about that," he told her. "Have you never thought how many years you've gone without things, just so we could get out of debt? Well, we're out at last and with still the corn crop in the field."

"It hasn't seemed such a long time."

"It has been though, sixteen years in June since we were married. Twenty since I was back East." Phil turned on his side facing her. "What would you think of a trip there? I'd like to see the Feldtmann old folks again."

"I don't know why you shouldn't go," she said; "you've always wanted to so much. We can afford it now, and this is the least busy time of year. I and the boys can look after the work well as not."

"Aren't you going?"

"Oh, mercy no! I don't know anyone there."

"Maybe you have someone of your own some place you'd like to visit? I—never thought to ask."

Maggie squeezed his hand. "My only living relatives not here are mother's people in Ireland, and I don't know them at all."

"I had thought you'd go," Phil said. "I'd like to take the boys, too, and go out on Circle Lake to show them what real fishing is compared to a muddy river—or those little bullheads out of our pasture waterholes! They'd have to miss school though; so I guess I won't mention it. Of

course Electra can't interrupt teaching to go. We could get somebody to cook and look after the house as far as you're concerned."

"No, just you go, Phillip," Maggie told him, "and then you won't have to worry about the farm at all."

"You're sure you'd rather stay? It's not just the farm?"

Maggie came closer and squeezed his hand again. "I want to be here to help Electra with her hope chest and things," she confided. "I don't think anyone could be happier than she'll be when she and Hal are together and have a child. Aren't children the limit nowadays! They've talked over their family like as if they were already married. She's been telling me. They're going to have two boys and two girls. 'Don't count your chickens. They might all be boys like mine,' I told her, but she laughed just as though she were sure. Couldn't we have a big wedding for her?"

"I've given it thought," Phil said, "but Irene Barker would have to be invited and see the ceremony right among a lot of people. We'd better not."

"That's the one thing I wish was different," Maggie said, "but Electra couldn't have found a nicer boy. I'm a little jealous when I think how much I love her, almost more than my own. Maybe it's because I never had a girl baby. You mustn't forget to put a nice stone on her mother's grave like you always promised." There was a pause and when her voice came again it sounded drowsy. "Of course you were right about the wedding."

Phil slipped an arm under her neck and drew her forehead to his lips. "I'm glad you mentioned the stone," he said.

After a while Maggie took a long breath. "Your arm will go to sleep that way."

"Huh uh," he said. He continued to stare across the darkness of her hair on the pillow at the light square of window, and did not free himself to turn over until he was sure she was sleeping.

Chapter 24

Phil arrived in New York City with an afternoon lay-over before his train left for Weichsel. The courteous attention of swift, neat redcaps in checking his luggage and calling his cab was forgotten in the ride up-town. Tall, new buildings made the streets seem narrower than remembered, and Phil clung to his seat with the driver recklessly cracking his whip through congestion of clanging trolleys and tooting automobiles mixed

with the long teams on dray wagons that Phil had known. He got out much sooner than he had intended, to the safety of sidewalk.

Afoot, unbelievable numbers of pedestrians added to his feeling of crowdedness. Phil had read of underground railroads in service, but he had not pictured the elevated tracks gone and hundreds of hurrying people pushing past each other in and out of mysterious pavement caverns. At 145th and Broadway he decided to enter one. In the unnatural yellow light of the tunnel with contained rumble of the train upon him, he became apprehensive of boarding the cars not knowing when or where to get off, and hastily re-ascended to sunlight. There he breathed deeply and walked until shops closed, and a crowd jammed streets and vehicles. Foreign features and mixed tongues of immigrants brought misgivings for the nation's future and recalled his passing glimpse of Omaha grown large and dingy with grime and smoke of factories and packing plants, and the new rambling expanse of Des Moines.

Phil ate supper back at the station restaurant. He dallied over his food with no wish at all left in him to visit Wall Street on his return trip. There was only the desire to pass quickly through the city and have it behind him.

When in gathering darkness the locomotive had emerged, and he was being borne swiftly northward through outlying semi-urban districts and toward home, a music came into his heart. It was an almost unbearable yearning to awaken next morning in the sturdy country home set back in the woods where he and Electra had walked and loved, just as if the rest of his life had never been. It occurred to him the Feldtmann farm would be a pleasant spot for Maggie and himself to spend their last years.

At midnight his train ride ended at the familiar little Weichsel station. When he hired a hack Phil observed happily to the driver: "The village doesn't change much, does it?"

"No, we stay a little dump," the man said. "It's Albany that grows. They've always had the river traffic, and then they got the through highways and even the stove factory."

Phil tried to look about him as they drove, but night mist had settled into the valley. Intuitively, he felt a sense of wrong direction. "Are you sure you are going the right way?"

The liveryman sniffed. "I ought to, Mister. I've known where Grandpa Feldtmann lived for more'n ten years!"

Phil turned up the collar of his overcoat about his throat. Must be he's out of sorts from so late a drive, he thought. He jolted and swayed with the vehicle for a while. "I suppose you were born here. Ever hear of the Garwoods?"

"The older heads speak of an old scalawag by that name who ran off

with a second wife and left a youngster here. They tell stories of how the boy used to wander the woods. Seems he married a Feldtmann girl that died. It's hard for me to say, being before my time. Were you acquainted with him?"

"I've heard of him," Phil said. "I spent some time here in early days." He leaned over the end of the spring seat, trying to see the nature of the wide grading over which they traveled. "They've improved the roads. I suppose the whole country has changed a lot?"

"Ain't changed hardly a bit so far as I can see."

They reached the Feldtmanns' too soon it seemed, but Phil recognized the skyline of trees. It was the same grove, same little hill behind. He paid, took his bags, and went up to the gate.

Not Prince, the good-natured collie, came bouncing to greet him but a terrier bristling with hostility. Phil knocked and then again more loudly. He turned about while he waited, facing the noisy feist's threatening half rushes. From within came sounds of movement and shuffle of slipped feet along the floor.

"Who is it?"

"Is this where Frenssen Feldtmann lives?" Phil asked. "It's important that I see him."

There was an exchange of words inside, the flicker of a match and a light. The door opened. "Hush up, Tige." The aged woman was clad in a long nightgown, white hair falling in a thin flow of silver about her shoulders. "I called Daddy," she said. "He's dressing."

Phil gazed at her so searchingly that she retreated from him a step, her eyes coming to rest on his black satchel.

"We—we don't have room to keep strangers."

Phil let fall the bags and held out his hands to her. "Don't you know me, Mom?"

She peered closely, her withered face a mixture of something half fear and credulity. "It's—it's—" Her hands began to shake, and she took his shoulder, turning his face into better light.

"It's *John Phillip!*" She tottered a little so that Phil caught her in his arm about her shoulders. "Daddy, Daddy Frenssen. It's John Phillip!" She began to hug him.

Frenssen came into the room running. He hugged them both, still clasped together, and his lips trembled in the midst of his now white beard. In another moment the old couple were laughing and crying together like children, and then Phil stood released.

Nothing would do but he must eat a bite right away. He sat down be-

side the kitchen table, and the terrier came over to sniff at his feet. Frenssen saw Phil look at the dog.

"Isn't he a mite 'side of old Prince? Came out of the woods to us half starved, and we kept him."

Phil nodded and smiled. "Somehow I was half expecting Prince, though of course that couldn't be."

Mother Feldtmann had been puttering about the stove in an ecstasy and setting things before him—rolls warmed fresh in the oven, real maple syrup and black coffee. "This coal oil stove Daddy got me is sure quick and handy," she said.

There were also newly gathered hazel nuts and great yellow apples. They urged Phil into stuffing himself, and the stream of questions from the old people sitting one on each side kept him in state of siege.

—"Hear that, Daddy? Our baby Electra engaged! Next fall she'll be married, you say?"

"In September. She was going to write of it, but I asked her to let me tell you."

"Is she getting a good boy?"

"There are none finer. He's kind, a good worker, and they're deeply in love."

"She must be so happy."

"Like a mother bird building a nest," Phil said. "She's fixing her linens and things."

"Is she still the picture of her mother?"

"Not as much so. She has the same gold hair, but is taller and larger and not so quick of spirits. She is very quiet. I should have had a photograph made for you, but I decided so suddenly to come. I'll see that you get their wedding picture."

"Son Otto finally married, but of course you knew. Nice woman and they have a boy. Remember how Otto used to tinker with clocks and watches? He's settled to running a jewelry store in Albany. You'll want to see him."

"Of course I will."

Mother Feldtmann kept planning places he must go and folks to see while Phil's eyelids drooped and in spite of himself his head slumped.

"You're tired out!" she cried.

They hustled him off to bed and the soft warmth of patchwork quilts and homemade feather ticking.

Phil awoke early, eager for the day. The house was silent. He dressed quietly and tiptoed out through the kitchen.

The morning air was clear and the last gray light ahead of sunrise pouring over the countryside, freshened and white with dew. Phil blinked and stared—at a land foreign to his eyes. The woods were gone; only roadside trees and scattered patches of second growth scrub oak in waste corners and gullied hillsides remained as evidence of the virgin forest that had been. He looked and looked down into the valley, but the broad sheen of the lake was not there. Instead it was the brown of autumn cornfields and plots which looked like truck gardens.

Phil searched his memory. Had the lake ever been there so close? Maybe he had gotten his wires crossed. Maybe Circle Lake lay beyond the ridge which in his mind had formed the dividing line between it and Big Lake. But even the ridge seemed unfamiliar, longer and straighter. There were so many houses in sight, a dozen from where he stood!

Phil started briskly across country, climbing fences as he came to them. The gardening question solved itself when he reached the first of the plots. Onions, acres and acres of onions!

The riddle of the ridge was also answered upon approach. It proved to be the graveled highway which the hack had traveled the night before. He stood upon it, half sitting against a little culvert abutment, and slowly his perplexity was diminished. Over to the right there remained some ruins of crude bridge piling where the old wagon road had crossed the "narrows." His memory had not slipped. Circle Lake had been where he remembered. By a cut it had been drained into Big Lake, and its bed transformed into farm land. Even Big Lake had lost the character of its name. The sun came above the hills, and miles down the swale-like contour of valley basin was a flashing sheet of water. The rest of Big Lake's bottom and shores had likewise been claimed for cultivation.

"'No change' that driver said last night. He must have been drunk!" Phil muttered. "The old folks mentioned there had been some, but God, I didn't expect this."

He started slowly up the gravel toward the narrow wagon road which led back to the Feldtmann home by the long way around, arriving behind the woodlot. He found the spring nook on the hillside where he and Electra used to sit, but it was weed-choked and the water flow a pathetic trickle. He cleared away leaves from the source, scooped out a basin, and sat down for it to fill. Phil's heart, which had begun beating rapidly as he approached the spring, slowed. He could remember the trepidation with which he had drawn Electra to this spot long ago and the manner in which she had given their kiss of betrothal. But he could not relive the trepidation or his impelling urge to speak his love—nor the yielding warmth of her lips. He stared down the slope through trees where the trail

had been, and within his chest the hollow which would not fill slowly lost its ache. The basin had begun overflowing. Phil waited until the water cleared, then stretched out face downward and drank. What had happened to the soil that the spring was going dry? He tested a sample between his fingers. It was sticky and reddish. "Old worn-out clay!" he said.

Phil sat for a while with his pipe, then put it away and drank again. With hands clasped behind him he went up a trace of path left toward the house.

Chapter 25

It was dark and sleeting when the single passenger alighted at the deserted plains siding. The train pulled out at once with swirl of red sparks flying backward under the engine, and the man stood alone on the cinders beside the track without a building in sight. Wind singing across open country whipped stinging ice pellets against his face. He caught up his bags and headed jubilantly into it: but the country road was long, and at times later he walked backwards to warm his cheeks and nose.

Shannon Garwood had stepped outside before going to bed. Out of blackness behind him emerged a form unnoticed, and he was suddenly seized by both shoulders. Shannon jumped, but was held fast and twisted his head about for glimpse of his assailant. His mouth opened wide. "Pa!" he yelled at top of his lungs. "Pa's back!"

Maggie threw open the door, and lamp light poured over them. "Good heavens, you scared us," she said. "I couldn't imagine what on earth Shan was screaming so about."

Phil left his things lying on the ground, sprang up the steps and caught her hands in his with the first real laugh of abandonment she had ever heard from him. Clarence had put aside his book to come over and stand near. Bob had been set down abruptly from Maggie's lap and still half asleep hung back until Phil opened his arms to him. "Don't you know your dad?" The boy put up his hands to be taken. Phil tossed him almost to the ceiling, catching and shaking him before he set him down. "It's Saturday. Where is Electra?"

"Can't you guess?"

Phil laughed again and slid off his overcoat, while Clarence brought his bags in and closed the door.

"You came home a lot sooner than we expected," Maggie said. "Have you had supper?"

Phil shook his head. "The train hasn't stopped long enough to get off

since mid-afternoon, and porters always charge three prices for what they sell." He spread his hands to the stove.

Maggie talked and prepared a lunch at the same time. "There's a new calf, spotted red and white." The older boys were busy exploring a flour sack half filled with nuts that had been part of the baggage. Bob clung to his father's legs.

After Phil had warmed a little, he unstrapped his suitcase, took out and unwrapped a crock-shaped brick of rich, brown maple sugar. "I want you kids to taste this; it's pure maple. Grandpa Feldtmann made it from his own grove. He has the only sugar maples left where they used to cover acres. I couldn't get you any chestnuts; those trees are all gone. About the only thing left is hazel brush along fencerows and some hickory." He picked up a table knife and rapped the handle hard across the sugar brick, shattering a section of it.

At first bite, Shannon thought his father stingy, having received a fragment not as large as his fist, but before he had finished it he discovered that the delicious stuff had a way of satisfying your appetite without filling your stomach.

By the time the older boys went to bed, Bob was asleep on his father's lap before the hearth. Maggie took him to his crib, and when she came back Phil held out his hand for her to draw up a chair beside his. "Did you have a nice trip, Father?" she asked.

"Yes, sort of." Phil continued to stare into the fire in the grate. "It's different now. I used to think I'd like to go back to live someday, but God, I wouldn't take those clay knobs they farm as a gift!"

"And how were Electra's grandparents?" Maggie asked.

"They're getting feeble and won't last many seasons. I talked with the old man about his property, told him how we'd agreed to fix it; Electra get her mother's share and what came from your folks to go to the boys."

Phil returned to thoughts of himself. Presently he said. "You know, we've done pretty well. The way farms have gone up, we must be worth twenty thousand. I'm going to ease up on working early and late, and I wish you would stop it. We've got enough, or will have as our land goes on rising, and we've done our share. Would you like to move back to town?"

"Oh, my, no! I didn't like it there at all. I'm so used to the farm I've grown fast."

"All right, we'll stay here," Phil said. "I'd as soon. The boys'll be able to do the farming with Clarence sixteen in December, and Shannon big enough to handle a team next summer. With gang plows and more horses they'll have time to spare; and if they marry, well, there'll be Bob

growing up. There'll be no one to help you in the house though when Electra is gone. I'll try to make up for her partly on your work if you'll really rest more."

"I like to keep busy," Maggie said. She stared at the fire in turn. "It seems such a little while since Electra was playing, and now to be in her own home next winter. Mightn't we give her and Hal an eighty to help them start?"

"That's occurred to me," Phil said, "but we'd have to do the same for each of the boys later. Someday you and I will have to depend on crop rent to live, and we want it to be enough. Besides it might be better for them to learn to do for themselves. They'll get the property in the end anyway and have that much more. I wouldn't mind buying a farm for them to rent, if I could find one priced reasonable."

Phil dismissed her question at that point to ruminate again. "A pile of change has come over the nation, as much right here as in the East; only living along with it and helping to make it I hadn't noticed. Three railroads into Plainsboro now and little sidings along tracks so I could ride to two miles from home instead of twelve. My trees grown into a big grove, native bluestem becoming a thing of the past. It's a shame when it took so long to get sodded and makes such fine pasture. People have gone crazy over grain prices and broken rough prairie that will never pay as farm land in the end. Rich as the level fields are yet, the fertility can't last forever. Believe me, I'm going to save all the grass I have left."

Maggie half dozed listening. It was late and she was tired.

"John Freeman didn't make a mistake, not breaking his land. He's missed the crops but he didn't wear out himself or his soil. His virgin prairie is worth double that of acres long cultivated. What fools people are in not looking ahead! Why Grandpa Feldtmann spent his young life slaving to clear a farm, and now it's near worthless. If he'd cleaned a garden patch and let all his fine timber stand, he'd be a rich man."

Phil leaned forward with stove-hook, gave the fire new breath at the grate and brought glowing coals once more pleasantly into view. "Our new land is putting them out of business in grain farming back East, so their drift is to bigger cities and factories. What will all those people in tenements do when the next Panic comes? They can't go West like I did, because there's no empty land left out here."

"Let's hope there won't be more hard times, Father."

"There always has been and always will be. Times have been too prosperous since the Spanish War. People have started too many big, new plans. We never get anywhere really except to fret and stew. Build

up and break down. Funny, funny world. Everything goes right back where it started."

Maggie let eyelids droop without effort to understand. She had never understood and after a few honest attempts had ceased to try—because in her simple disinterest she had early perceived that Phil did not understand either. When at last he ceased speaking she opened her eyes to see him sitting, chin in hand, elbow resting on his knee.

"Did you put a stone on Electra's mother's grave?" she asked to bring him back to her realm, for life and cemeteries were of earth.

"Huh uh. I couldn't find it."

"Couldn't find a stone?"

"No, the grave. The county had taken over graveyards for upkeep, and the records got mixed. Maybe it was here when I inquired of the keeper, and maybe over there. The Feldtmanns didn't try to remember. They think it better to forget—and they're right." Phil took a quiet breath and turned to Maggie. His face was sober, strong, and tender. "It was her dying wish that I re-marry," he said. "I know now of what she was thinking, that it was turning out the only way left. She could never have stood up under burden of family and field work and the despairs of this country. She was plucky. She had will to try, and she would have come out here to me just as I had it planned, but the effort would have killed her. She was too sensitive and fragile. It hurt me so much it changed me, for I kept remembering and remembering how different it might have been if she or my mother had lived. I was jealous of wealth and happiness everywhere I saw them, simply because I couldn't have them. I shouldn't have let myself go on feeling that way, and living in the past. It wasn't fair to you, Mom; I made you unhappy too."

"You never mistreated me."

"Yes I did. You always tried hard and were so good, but I was so discouraged and ground down by work that it made me cranky—and I didn't feel toward you all a husband should when I married you." He stopped, for his voice had become unsteady on the confession. He bent to her, and his lips touched her forehead. "I do now." Then he tipped her head, and his lips were warm on her mouth.

Maggie's voice made a breaking sound. She was wide awake after the kiss, but the words she strove for would not come, words to convey to him how much it was worth to hear him say what at last he had said.

Phil smiled at the tears in her eyes and gathered her work-strong hands into his. "You are a better woman than I am a man."

Chapter 26

The spring morning was too muddy for field work, and at breakfast Clarence suggested driving the stock cattle to the far pasture.

"Not yet," said Phil. "I want to save that grass over there for later in the summer."

"It don't save to p-pitch hay out of the barn into the feed lot and then have to mow more to put back in."

"You work without thinking," Phil said. "It will save a good deal if the fields dry out in time to pasture the wheat again before it begins to joint."

"If they do," said Clarence. "And then we'll want to be disking corn. We aren't doing anything now."

"There's plenty to catch up on around here," Phil told him rather sharply, "and plenty of time to drive the cattle after we know for sure about the wheat."

Clarence closed his lips as usual at Maggie's glance. Her silent appeals irritated Phil almost as much as the boy's contrariness, because she so often succeeded where his words failed, and such intercession left him no basis for protest.

Clarence did not give the stock cattle hay, his regular morning task. Instead, as soon as milking was over he took the wire-stretcher and went off alone to repair fences, leaving the haying to Phil, until Shannon came with a second pitchfork to help him. When they had carried the milk to the house, Maggie put the boy to taking down the stove pipe from the heater for the summer and pounding out the soot. Phil, still in high-top overshoes, picked for himself the job of cleaning out a lean-to pig sty which record spring rains had transformed into a manure mire. He saw from its ankle depth that Clarence was probably right about wheatfields not drying out for pasturing, but it was too late to agree with him now. Why did they always differ and irritate each other? Phil felt guiltily glad he had refrained from challenging him for not feeding the cattle. That was a minor chore, and only the affront of leaving it had angered him. Yet how could he be sure it was an affront? The fences had been waiting for days and their repair a full morning's work. Maybe he didn't mean it that way at all, thought Phil.

The task Phil was about was simple; and once he had excused Clarence he fell to talking to himself in mulling over the perpetual land question. Electra's teaching term had closed. She and Hal were to be married in the fall. "I've promised to buy a place for them to rent permanently," he muttered, "but damned if I want to go in debt again. This so-called

Roosevelt prosperity has made everybody want twice what land is worth."

The hogs, unaccustomed to being routed from their sty, wallowed squealing in the lot in front. A bolder member pushed an inquisitive snout past the wheelbarrow into the doorway and fled grunting at a flourish of the scoop shovel. The sweet and swillish odor of potential pork chops rose unnoticed about Phil in the warm air.

Phil's reverie was violently broken by a scream from the house. The screen door banged open, and Shannon ran out shrieking: "Pa—Pa—aa!"

Phil straightened abruptly, bringing his head into sharp contact with a beam in the low roof. "Ouch! Jesus Christ!" Before he could swear further the boy burst in upon him.

"Mom fell down cellar. I think she's killed!"

Phil dropped his shovel and rushed to the house. Electra, petrified with horror before the cellar steps, he thrust roughly aside.

Maggie lay in a loose sprawl on the wet earth floor of the cave among fragments of a shattered crock. There was a thin stream of blood welling from a little gash where her head had struck the rim of the pickle barrel. Phil dropped on one knee beside her and got her into his arms. He staggered under his sagging load up the steps only to be blocked at the porch by Bob, big-eyed with fright. "Get that damned kid out of the way!" he shouted. Electra snatched him to one side. Shannon caught hold under Maggie's shoulders to help lift, and they carried her to the kitchen cot, their shoes trailing mud across the linoleum. Phil began rubbing her hands. "Bring me some cold water and a cloth."

Maggie came back to consciousness while Phil was bathing her face from the washpan Electra held for him. "Just lie still," he said when she opened her eyes. Then after a moment he saw that her mind had cleared and asked: "Do you feel all right?"

"I guess so."

"How did it happen?"

"The steps were muddy and one of the rocks tilted," she said. "I don't remember past bumping along to the bottom."

Electra took the washcloth from her father and gently sopped the cut on Maggie's forehead. "It's stopped bleeding," she said. "We were all scared to death."

Maggie laughed.

"Don't get up," Phil said, as she started to move. He saw her wince. "Are you hurt someplace else?"

"It's my knee."

Phil folded back her skirt. "It's bruised and swelling." She winced again as he touched it. "I'll call Dr. MacGregor."

"No, no," Maggie said. "It isn't that bad."

"Well, you can't tell—"

"I know it isn't," she insisted. "You can tie a Sweet Mary leaf on my head, and my knee isn't broken for I moved it. Look." The joint bent a little to her effort, but her face drew up.

"Stop that!" said Phil.

Maggie tried to smile. "I'll be all right."

"You're going to stay down quiet anyway while we put hot cloths on it till we see. I'll help you to the bedroom."

They were able to keep Maggie off her feet only until near noon when she got up to hobble to the stove and check the seasonings. She found Phil sitting at the kitchen table with the mirror propped before him shaving. The boys were at the sink washing for dinner.

"I'm going to town this afternoon to get cement and fix that damn cellar right," Phil declared, "before someone kills himself. If the weather keeps on rainy we can't work the fields anyhow. We'll pipe water into the kitchen, too, while we're about it and build a milk house so you won't have to carry those heavy jars up and down steps." He glanced guiltily aside while he wiped lather from the blade of the razor onto a piece of newspaper. "Come to think of it, we planned all those things when we were first married."

Maggie looked at him quickly and involuntarily, but not long enough to try to catch his eyes. "That will be nice," she said.

Phil turned to Clarence. "I'll take you along and buy you a new suit. You've outgrown your blue one till I hold my breath every time you stoop."

Shannon chortled. "Wouldn't it be funny if he split!"

"*You* would think so."

"I want long pants," Clarence said.

"I guess you can have them," Phil told him genially.

Shannon set up a clamor. "When am I going to get a new suit!"

"You can have Clarence's," Maggie promised.

"That's the way it goes. By the time Clair wears the new off anything, it's always the right size for me!"

"Oh hush," Maggie said. "You kids are always wanting something."

"Well, he's going to get long pants, and I want 'em too."

"She told you to hush," Phil said.

"You're not big enough yet for long pants," Clarence whispered, but Phil overheard the taunt.

"Any more of that out of you, and you won't get them either," he said. "Now both of you shut up."

Clarence pushed back the grin aimed at his brother. Shannon finished wiping at the roller towel with a vicious yank and stamped over to the table, where he sulked through the meal Electra dished out.

Phil looked at him from time to time as they ate. When he had finished and risen, he turned to him before he went out to harness the team. "Well, get yourself ready, too."

Flashlike the boy's freckled face completely changed. "Long ones?"

"Yes, since you think they have to be."

Shannon was on his feet in a bound. "Whoopie!" He almost flew to change clothes.

Maggie was lying on the bed resting her knee when Phil came in to put on clean overalls and shirt before leaving. "I know that kid doesn't particularly have to have a suit too," he told her, "but I don't want one to think he's not being treated as well as the rest." He came over and smoothed the wrinkles from the pillow under her knee. "Is there anything you need or want besides groceries?"

Maggie smiled back at him. "No. Just don't forget the list."

The cellar received concrete steps and a floor within the next several days. Other items of running water and milkhouse were postponed and forgotten in excitement of dramatic events that began with the prolonged jangle of a telephone line-call from central. "Flood warnings. Advise all interests. Nebraska weather stations report cloudbursts on upper rivers. Do not panic. Do not panic. You have thirty-six hours to evacuate Kansas valleys."

The warnings thus broadcast continued periodically through the night. Kansas skies had cleared, making the flood threat incredible. Nevertheless, Phil loaded his family into his spring wagon and drove out to see the river crest—all except Electra, who went with Hal. They found water already over-flowing lowlands of the miles wide valley. The telephone alarms had drawn a crowd to the best look-out bluffs where river channel curved close to the road. Young people had come by bicycles and on horseback. Clarence eyed most the girls who rode up brazenly straddle in the fashion set by President Roosevelt's daughter, and Maggie noticed and tightened her lips. Teams and carriages of parents lined telephone poles, trees and fenceposts. Folks hurried to hold their horses when George Foster chugged up in a new Velie automobile. Men left the bluffs to walk about the vehicle and rub its glistening black fenders.

Bill Addison sank his hands again and again into the upholstery. "Man, feel that leather!" he said.

Oscar Karns squeezed the rubber horn bulb, and laughed and laughed when people jumped. "Will it actually go twenty miles an hour?"

"It's guaranteed for thirty," the banker said, "if you have the nerve to hold it wide open! I'd be afraid to myself."

Joel Palmer went from listening to a group standing aside. "He can't make me believe that. What good would it do anybody? There aren't roads to drive that fast on."

"They have them in the East," Andy said.

"What do you say, Garwood?" Mike Kelly asked.

"They have lots of autos back there," Phil told him, "and roads graded sixty feet wide and graveled!"

"But will they ever come to stay out here?"

Phil pursed his lips. "When big companies invest millions to make them and men of Foster's calibre open their pocketbooks to buy, the country won't be long without good roads to drive them on."

"Yes, and I read that some daredevils back East are working on contraptions to actually fly!"

Bruno Haeckel lifted both his hands. "Yah. I ble'ef not dot stuff ve go like birds!"

A shout from watchers on the bluffs drew everyone on the run. A team of horses still in harness could be seen swimming far out.

"Jesus, I wonder who the driver was!" Ross Overbrook asked. "And why didn't the damn fool get out yesterday?"

"He didn't believe it was coming," Phil said. "You can't warn some people enough. They'll stay with their homes regardless."

"I heard there was a sheriff and deputies up north somewhere caught on a railroad bridge with the grade gone on both sides," Jim York said. "They went out there to watch for floating bodies."

"Hell! They couldn't do any good if they saw some," Phil said.

The river was rising so rapidly that the eye could register it inching up the steep cliffs. The muddy water roared and boiled, and undercut masses of earth collapsed with loud, churning splashes. Logs, bridge timbers, and whole trees floated past. Again and again from huge cottonwoods growing near the bank came explosive popping and cracking of roots. Great crests would shudder and sway as though attacked by a whirlwind, then begin to lean and go crashing over.

Even flood-experienced valley farmers in the crowd were frightened sick. Their year's crop they had earlier given up as lost, but most of them had left livestock behind, driven to the supposed safety of high knolls. There were also their buildings to think about with the sight of houses and barns going by, and now the grinding power of the terrific current raised a new

fear. "There's no telling whose farm may have the river channel smack across it when this water goes down," they said. "It's liable to straighten out old bends or cut new ones anywhere."

Folks who had come farthest began reluctantly starting home near chore time, and Maggie came to Phil to tell him Clarence wanted to leave early. "The boys are going to a party tonight."

"Again?" Phil said. "They've been going three or four times a week!"

"I think Clair is starting to look at the girls," she said.

Phil stared at her. "He's only sixteen."

"He's beginning to get tall though."

Phil shook his head. "We shouldn't have got him those long pants yet a while. Well, we'll take the long road back along the bluffs and see as much as we can on the way."

In the spring wagon Maggie rode in front beside Phil with Bob set back in the seat between them where in squirming he could not fall forward. The older boys sat on the floor at the rear, hanging their feet over the end.

For half a mile Maggie kept gazing at the valley, still fascinated by so great an expanse of water. "My! I wouldn't live along this river for anything, would you, Pa?"

Phil flicked the lazy gray with the whip tassel to keep her in pace with the sorrel and continued to stare at the slow turning wheel. "I don't know," he answered. "This is the first bad flood I've seen, and on dry years the valley farmers raised crops when we failed on hill farms. Now might be a good time to get a bargain in river bottom land, while people are scared."

"Buy one with a lot of river bank, Pa, so we'll have a good place to fish and hunt ducks!" Shannon said.

"That's all you think about," Maggie said. "You're around with that Chester Freeman too much."

"Gee whiz, Mom, Chet's a dandy pal. He knows all about fishin' and trappin'. I never caught hardly anything till Chet and his Dad showed me how."

"Yes, his dad!" Maggie said. "He's too lazy to do anything else, and he's raising Chester to be like him. Suppose a flood washes away your house and you drown! Then what?"

Phil frowned at the argument. "You don't need to drown. If you get out when warned it's safe. It wouldn't do to put up good buildings without flood insurance." He pointed obliquely with his whip to a field of second bottom land, level as a floor and lushly carpeted with young, green oats. "That high up it never floods. I could have had that farm or any of dozens like it for homesteading; the valley land was the last to be taken.

Instead I took a timberclaim on rough upland and spent all these years trying to stop washing and ditches."

"Why didn't you pick the good one?" Clarence asked.

"How was I to know better?" Phil demanded. "Everybody talked floods, floods. The Indians had left tales about them. We didn't even know the difference between first and second bottoms in those days. Besides, folks said river land was too sandy for crops."

They approached a cross road, and Clarence hitched, impatient at the walking pace of the team. "Can't we turn at the corner? It'll be closer home."

Phil twisted in the seat to look back full at the boys. "What's going on tonight that you kids are in such a rush?"

"It's just another May basket hanging," Clarence said.

"In June! That used to be for May and only the first day."

"It was so much fun we didn't want to stop."

"What do you do at those parties?"

"We hang a basket on a doorknob where they're not expecting us and all holler 'May basket' and scatter and hide. The kids there have to come out and find and tag us. We're going to Overbrook's tonight."

"That isn't so far that you need to be in a hurry."

"Aw, he's got a girl to get first," Shannon said.

Maggie glanced at Phil, and Clarence turned pink under his father's scrutiny. "Why, you aren't dry behind the ears yet!" Phil said.

Clarence got still redder at Shannon's snicker of delight.

"It sounds as if it would take all night, hunting down people in the dark," Maggie said.

"Not so long," Shannon told her. "A person tagged helps catch others, and you never know who to run from."

They had reached the corner. Phil turned as Clarence had requested and slapped the horses into a trot. "All right," he said, "but you kids don't be out late."

Near home with mind back on the land problem Phil thought of his crib of Wisconsin ninety-day corn. River folks would need an early maturing variety for re-planting after the flood, and no one else in the area had any. I can sell that corn for seed at a premium, he mused. The extra cash will count toward paying for a new farm.

Chapter 27

Clarence was awakened early next morning after the May basket party by noise of his father storming into the kitchen downstairs. There was no mistaking his tone, and the boy knew at once Phil had seen the horse he had ridden the night before. While he was trying to make up his mind whether to go down at once and take his jawing or remain until called, the stairway door was jerked open.

"Clarence—Shannon. Get up!"

"All right," Clarence called back promptly, but he dallied dressing, hoping to hear his father leave the house. When it became clear he was being waited for below, he gave up dawdling and quickly tied his shoes. He'll be coming up here if he has to yell again, he thought.

Shannon had only mumbled from the depth of his pillow at the summons, and Clarence shook him before leaving. "Don't go back to sleep," he warned. "Dad's sore already." Then he hurried down to get it over with without Shannon for a spectator.

Phil stood up the moment he entered the dining room. "You were racing Prince last night, weren't you? —Or was it Shannon?"

"I g-g-galloped him some coming home," Clarence said.

"Galloped some? You run hell out of him and then didn't even stable him. I found him all over lather."

"I thought he was only sweating a little."

"I know a damn sight better! His sides were caked with mud from rolling. You turned him out so I wouldn't see him." He glared at Clarence, who stood shifting from foot to foot. "And you were out late when I told you not to be, too."

Clarence continued to look at the floor and fought back a quivering that threatened to draw up the corners of his mouth. "N-n-not very late," he managed to say.

"Well, Prince was still soaking wet and his legs a-tremble when I led him in. Now you get out to the barn and rub him down good. And this settles it. You don't take him on the road gadding about any more!"

Clarence winced with a catch of breath that pulled weakness into his stomach as real calamity rushed over him—no more riding or driving. He knew better than to plead or argue the ultimatum. He got his jacket and buttoned it in silence, went through the kitchen past Maggie and Electra to the porch for milk pails and on out into the cool, first brightness of sunrise.

Shannon had started downstairs in time to hear the last words and overtook his brother on the way to the barn—Shannon, who read comedy

into all predicaments. He thrust his tongue blandly into the side of his mouth, for he knew Clarence had a date for Friday night and had expected to take the buggy. Clarence's scowl was warning for the moment against remarks. When he finished with Prince and also sat down to milk, Shannon kept peering at him from under his cow's flank, always with tongue exaggeratedly in cheek. He expected a squirt of milk at his face any second and kept ready to retaliate, but Clarence refused to be baited.

They carried the milk to the house and set the pails in the corner for Maggie to strain. Shannon kept grinning. Phil was still outside.

The kitchen table was set. They washed and took their places. Electra was frying flap-jacks and had a stack hot, crisp-edged and golden brown on the back of the stove. Maggie carried them to the table. She glanced at Clarence's face.

"Sit down with the boys, Electra," she said. "I'll attend to the rest." Her voice was troubled. She had not said a word during the reprimanding, but had known ahead of Phil of the activities of the night. Maggie seldom slept until her boys were safely home. While Phil slumbered she lay awake or sometimes arose softly and sat beside the window listening for them. She had heard their low voices from the bedroom above excitedly discussing the race, and she was doubly glad Phil had not known how very late the hour had been.

Through strain of silence at the table, Clarence looked up from his plate at his sister. "Won't you be glad, Sis, when you're married and out of all this!" he burst out.

Shannon snickered then and piled another cake a-top his bacon. "Clair's trouble is he ain't gonna get to take sweet, little Norma Addison buggy ridin' tomorrow night."

"Why can't I have a team and buggy. All other boys do."

"Not all," Electra corrected mildly. "Many of them walk."

"What of it? He needn't get so blamed grumpy about his horses; there's no use having a team and not use them. He'll bawl me out once too often, and I'll tell him where to head in at and leave!"

"You mustn't talk that way about your father," Maggie said. "Some day he won't be with you any more, and then you'll wish you hadn't."

"Rats!" Shannon said. "Clair won't run away. He couldn't leave his dear Norma." Maggie looked at him and shook her head, but that did not stop him—he had thought of old maid Grace Kline. "Say! If Norma turns you down, mebbe you can get Gracie. She's got a horse and buggy of her own." Clarence kicked violently at his brother under the table. But experience with Clarence's reactions had taught Shannon to keep his shins out of range.

"Hush, boys," Maggie warned. "He's coming in."

Clarence bolted his last bites of pancake and left the table as soon as his father sat down. Shannon finished leisurely before following to hitch up their teams to cultivate corn.

Maggie did not worry seriously about the quarrel even though Clarence was still sullen during the noon meal; friction before between him and Phil had always blown over. She might have been right that nothing would develop if it had not been for Shannon and his incessant teasing. He was still gleefully at it when they unharnessed the horses in the barn that evening.

"Have you decided about Gracie yet?" he asked for the hundredth time. "Huh? Are you going to take her instead? I'll ask her for you if you want me to!"

Tantalized to the breaking point, Clarence wheeled in unexpected rage and lashed his tormentor across the head with a hitch-rein. "Shut up!" he screamed.

It was not a vicious blow, but there was a rivet in the end of the strap, and the metal left a gash over Shannon's eyes. The younger boy had no sooner passed his hand across the stinging spot on his forehead and seen blood covering his fingers than his grin twisted, and he piled straight over the divide-railing which separated the stalls.

It was the first time anyone had ever seen Shannon Garwood angry, and, though taller by a head, Clarence quailed before the bulldog charge. Shannon cornered him against the manger where they grappled and rolled to the ground under the horse's feet.

From the hayloft overhead, Phil heard grunts of scuffle and blows and ran down the ladder. He dragged them from beneath the prancing animal with Clarence still clinched in his brother's arms.

Maggie caught first intimation of dark trouble when she heard Phil's voice loud and furious: "You've gone too far this time!" Through the kitchen window she saw him marching the ruffled, bareheaded boys into the barnyard and dropped her work and ran out the door.

"Wait—wait," she cried.

Electra started to follow but stopped at the porch, holding Bob there by the hand. This time Phil would stand for no mediation from Maggie. He was already whipping Shannon with a halter rope and finished it soundly. Then he turned at once to Clarence, but in his rage the older boy did something he had never before dared do; he talked back to his father. Pale and trembling with one cheek knuckle welted, his sweaty, manure-stained shirt torn down the back, he stood and faced him. "Y-you've never l-let me do things I wanted to," he shouted. "I've never had a horse

of my own like other boys. All I've done is work for you, and if you make me take a licking I'll go!"

Phil's face turned as white as the boy's. His stubbly chin jutted out under the graying bar of his mustache. "You'll shut your mouth and take what I give you same as your brother!"

Maggie opened her lips to say something softening, but a wave of deathly sickness rushed upon her, choking words back into her breast. Clarence's face had become her own stubborn father's. Maggie had not until that moment realized how much the boy resembled his grandparent. As Phil took a step toward him, she broke into great, dry sobs.

"I'll g-g-go," Clarence repeated, his lips quivering.

"You can go and be god damned when I'm through with you, but don't ever darken my door again if you do!"

"No, wait!" Shannon cried. He burst into wild, terrified weeping. "It was my fault. Lick me again—but—but let him stay!"

"No, by God, you've had yours. I've told you both and told you again about that damned quarreling, but when you get started you stay at it like cats and dogs. I settle the arguments around here, and I won't have you fighting."

Clarence turned about as Phil advanced and put his face into his arms against the side of the corncrib as Shannon had done. There he submitted stonily to his beating and afterwards hurried straight to the house. Maggie followed with tears running down her cheeks, and Phil without a glance after them went angrily back into the barn with the halter rope.

Clarence was in his room packing when Maggie entered. She stole up close to him. "Clair?"

The boy refused to look at her.

"I don't want you to go away." She tried to put her arms about him, to kiss him, but he resisted sullenly.

"I ain't mad at you, Mom. If I can't do things like other boys here, I'll go someplace else. That's all."

"Where will you go? You haven't any place."

"I can get a job and work. I'll make money."

"Maybe I can get him to buy you a bicycle; that's almost as good as a horse. Stay till morning anyway."

"It's no use."

"I'll talk to Pa for you if you'll stay. You get to keep your pay anyway when you work out. That's more than most folks let their children do, more than mine did."

"It ain't enough." He tied the corners of a bundle, hoisted it over his shoulder and caught up his valise in the other hand.

Maggie made a last, desperate entreaty. "If you go now, he'll never let you come back. Please."

"I don't care. I don't want to come back."

He went on down the stairs and paused before speechless Bob and Electra. "Good-by," he said.

The tears gushed into Electra's eyes. "Stay," she cried.

"No."

Shannon was bathing his forehead at the kitchen sink, and as Clarence walked past him through the doorway without speaking, he dabbed his face quickly into the towel and ran after him. "I'm sorry. I won't tease you any more."

Coming up from behind Shannon put his hand on his brother's shoulder, but Clarence jerked away from it. Shannon quickened his steps to remain alongside. "I mean it, Clair. I'll milk your cows for you—and you can have my ball and bat." As they left the yard he stepped ahead and in front so that momentarily Clarence had to pause. "It was my fault, and I don't blame dad." Some of the entreaty had left Shannon's voice, replaced by manliness. "He won't stay mad at us." Clarence moved to brush past him and he stepped aside. "Okay then, be stubborn," Shannon said. Maggie and Electra, watching from the porch, went back inside when he turned toward the house. Phil was nowhere in sight.

Clarence went down the road. The sun was setting behind streaks of clouds and the interior of the woodlot grove already growing dusky. Its rows of trees with familiar shade stretched ahead along his right. Reluctantly he stared into it, walking slowly, then turned his face quickly the other way. But on the opposite side of the road he looked across forty acres of corn not long planted. In that field he had learned to guide a plow for a straight furrow and felt the pride in his accomplishment. He thought of the team, old and very gentle—bought especially for him and Shannon to learn with; and Phil's parting admonition the first time he was sent alone to the field with other horses rang now again in Clarence's ears. "Dick and Queen are skittish. If they scare and start to run, you jump clear of the disk. If they want to run away and smash things up, let them go. Just get yourself out of the way!"

Clarence had never told anyone, but he had not obeyed. Indelibly fixed in his mind was the sight of an ear-flattened jackrabbit erupting from its hidden nest under the forefeet of the horses, and team rearing high as they swerved and plunged away. Manfully he had clung to the lines shouting "whoa" and pulling with all his strength, feet braced on a lever, and he had managed to stay on the bouncing seat until he had turned them into a fence corner. For minutes after it was over and he had slid off to the

ground, he could only sit in the dust and clods sweating the cold fright of how nearly he had been dragged under the rolling blades.

Remembrance of his father's unheeded injunction to care further brought to mind that when he and Shannon in the barn had rolled fighting under the feet of their mettlesome bay, Phil had dived in and dragged them out of danger. Back also came Shannon's words: "He won't stay mad."

Clarence dawdled along the border of the grove and finally sat down on the grassy road bank beside the last trees at the corner. Falterings of irresolution passed through him, stealing away the appeal of fancied adventures in the world. From down the road a mile, a blustery masculine voice broke out in oaths and maledictions across the stillness of evening. It was answered by shrill retaliatory epithets in a feminine pitch. Jeremy Hendricks on another rampage with his family. Clarence had heard them at it time and again ever since childhood, but that had never occurred to him before.

Darkness continued to gather, and save for night insects the world became very quiet after a while. If he went back now and in the rear way, Pa would never know that he had packed his things and started. Pa would never show that he was sorry, if he was, by looking into his room or asking about him. For minutes longer, Clarence stared down the slope at the dark, silent house inset beyond the trees. Then he gathered up his bags and started slowly back to it. Even had he suspected and looked, he could not have seen his father standing only yards away in the shadow of the largest oak—nor did he hear the long, long breath exhaled softly through the gray mustache.

Chapter 28

One extreme follows another so country folks say, and the year of the flood it was true.

When the rains ceased they ceased entirely. Withering July winds swept in from the southwest, and together with perpetual sunshine dried flooded soils of river valleys into a hard-baked crust. There inch-wide cracks opened a foot deep. In upland fields corn tassels whitened and wilted the day they came out, and the leaves rustled as in October. Wheat alone was far enough toward maturity to survive for a crop.

The air was unbearably muggy the first day of the heat wave; and temperatures, passing 100 degrees so abruptly after cool rains, overcame men and work animals by dozens. Clarence came in from the field staggering, his face ghost white, and he had to keep to the shade for a week.

Few of the afflicted died, but many were never again the same strong men and women.

Phil slaved all that a human could endure with his future son-in-law on the river farm bought for him, reconstructing fences and dragging out trees uprooted or deposited by the waters. On the first day of their work Electra drove over in the buggy to bring the noon lunch and to see the farm upon which she was to live. The house had been shifted half off its foundation and corner-jammed between trunks of two great cottonwoods by pressure of the current, and one end was entirely gone from the barn. While Phil tied her horse, Hal helped her from the buggy and put a muscled, grimy arm about her as she stood and gazed.

"I've been thinking hard all morning, honey," Hal said, "and we'll have to postpone the wedding to the first of the year." He swept his free arm toward the fields—already foot-high jungles of cockleburrs and young cottonwoods and willows from seed left with the layer of mud. "They're growing like mad in that silt. Every acre has to be plowed before they get too big to turn under, or the land can never be put to crops again. Repair of buildings will just have to wait till last." Electra turned her face. He saw his own disappointment answered in her eyes. Yet she squeezed his hand on her waist with her arm.

When Phil rejoined them they ate, sitting on the ground, the lunch spread out on newspapers under shade of the cottonwoods which had held the house from floating away. Electra's gaze kept returning to it.

"It's a mess to look at now," Phil said, "but don't you worry. I'll repair everything into good shape for you."

Hal stood up at once after swallowing his last bite. "The sooner I get back to work, the sooner we'll be finished."

"Just so you don't overtax yourselves under this sun," Electra said.

As Hal went toward her, Phil grinned and turned his back to untie the horses while they kissed.

As soon as Electra had driven away the men returned to grubbing out mudded-in logs and brush piles to be burned when dried.

The sediment into which they dug was of mealy texture, rich and black. It meant fertility unexcelled. Once Hal paused to test a sample between thumb and fingers. He looked at it, shaking his head. "It's a damned shame how much of this gets washed away and wasted."

Then Phil remembered the ruined hillsides of Dad Feldtmann's farm, and he nodded soberly. This gain for Hal was the loss of fellow Americans. All that splendid loam had eroded from the slopes of other farms farther up the valley and tributaries, and much more had been lost down the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico. Erosion no longer controlled by

natural vegetation was fast leaving gullies and clay knobs on the upland and sand dunes in sections of valleys. And it was not just along Kansas streams. From far-off places in the agricultural heart of the nation had come tales of horror and destruction. Down the Missouri, the Platte, the Arkansas, and the Oklahoma Red had gone swirling muddy waters crashing through dykes and levees, inundating homes and towns. Both men were thinking of all that and read it in each other's faces.

"The government ought to make people take care of their land if they won't do it themselves," Hal burst out.

Again Phil nodded. "Someday the country will wake up," he said, "and then we'll have laws. I don't like government interference, but it seems it's the only way."

The farm buildings were at last ready for occupancy late in December, and the wedding took place on January 1st. It was the first clear day following a storm, and the sun shone steely bright upon the countryside cleanly dressed in fresh snow. Hal came in his sleigh for Electra in the afternoon, his fastest stepping team reined high, their satin black coats curried and brushed to match their new harness. He swept into the yard and circled around beside the cement walk from the porch. "Happy New Year!" he shouted.

Electra had been watching the road and came running down the steps before he had time to alight. She held gathered, safely above soiling, the white foam of the gown that fell below her velvet coat, and the ends of the blue and gold scarf wound about her head and throat trailed over her shoulders in the wind. The family followed after her to see the couple off, and Shannon went at once to the heads of the nervous young mares. He held a bridle and stroked their shining necks while Hal put down the lines and leaned over for one of Electra's mittened hands. She placed a slippered foot on the rest, and he helped her to spring up beside him. He moved the charcoal footwarmer under her feet and kept an arm about her after he had tucked her in.

Phil chuckled. "This is one time she didn't keep you waiting! Happy New Year, Son."

Hal pushed back his fur cap and tightened Electra against him. "It's an extra happy one for me." He kissed her and their lips clung.

Clarence whistled. "You two have been practicing!"

Hal laughed. "It must be something in the air. Andy York is getting married today, too."

"I read in the courthouse news that he'd bought the license," Phil said. "I've known it was coming, for he told me last fall he was going to

Hastings, Nebraska, to manage an implement store for Vivian's uncle. Her people live up there, but I hadn't expected the wedding until after her school term. I suspect the fact that it is William Jennings Bryan's home state had a good deal to do with Andy's decision."

Maggie frowned automatically at the reference to politics. "They chose today because it is Dean and Emma's anniversary," she said. "The shivaree crowd is coming here first, so you want to be ready for them early."

Shannon had stepped aside from the team and was kneading a big handful of snow behind his back, but Electra had seen him scoop it up. She nudged Hal and he popped his whip, so that the sleigh leaped away. Shannon cut loose with the snowball after them, but the fluffy dry flakes were not yet packed hard, and the missile disintegrated in the air. "That wasn't fair," he shouted.

Electra and Hal waved together as they left the yard. "We promise to be back on time," they called.

Maggie was already hurrying to get indoors, her arms tightly folded over her hands for warmth. "We'll have to hustle to do up the chores and then get their surprise ready for them." She lowered her voice to Phil. "You don't suppose Oscar Karns might come to the shivaree—drunk like he is so often?"

"No. He knows better than to show up at my place tonight!"

From the probate judge Hal and Electra went to Irene Barker's for supper before returning to Phil's. The afternoon breeze had died and the still, searching cold of dusk in winter had settled when they drove again into the farmyard. The buildings stood gray and bleak except for the yellow light behind steamed window panes of the big house. Shannon and Clarence in thick Mackinaws came running out together, their caps pulled over their ears and unbuckled overshoes clattering.

"You two go right in by the fire," Clarence said. "We'll take care of the team." He stepped up beside the sleigh for Electra as Shannon went again to the horses' heads. When Hal helped her over the side, Clarence caught her under the arms and turning with a couple of quick steps through the snow stood her upon the clean-swept walk. "There you are." Hal was beside her stamping his feet and the boys already leading off the horses and sleigh as Phil threw open the door.

"Don't pay any attention to your shoes," he called. "The floor will be tracked anyway before the night's over."

In the dining room he pushed them up side by side to the heater and took their coats. Maggie came in from the kitchen with coffee, past Bob peering from the doorway. She had steaming cups in their hands and was standing between them with an arm around each when Phil came

back from the closet. He had not heard her say a word yet and looked into her face. "My God, Mom, you're not going to bawl at their wedding!"

Maggie tightened the corners of her mouth against their quivering. "I—don't know if I can help it."

Hal put an arm about her shoulders. "You haven't lost anybody. You've just gained *another* boy."

Electra turned her blue eyes full and warm upon him, then stretched up and kissed Maggie's cheek.

Phil brought chairs for them all and when they were sitting, Bob sidled in near to Hal. "Are you gonna be a brother now?"

"Of course," Maggie said. "Didn't I tell you he was?"

"Just like Clair and Shan?"

"Sure," Hal said.

"Mom said you and Sis were gonna move away."

"We aren't going very far," Hal told him. "Maybe you'd like to come and live with us and be our boy."

Bob squirmed. "No," he said. He backed up against Phil. "I have to stay here and help you, don't I, Pa?"

Phil put his hands on the small shoulders and looked at the upturned face. "I couldn't let you have him. He's the best worker I've got."

There was a rush of running feet on the walk outside followed by a stamping on the porch. Clarence and Shannon came in, threw their coats and caps in the corner, crowded up to the stove. Their faces and hands were red. After they had warmed a little they looked toward their parents.

Maggie stood up. "Any time you're ready, I guess."

"There's no use hiding it longer," Shannon said. "Come on, Sis." He stepped to the closed sliding doors to the sitting room. He turned the lock and with Clarence pushed back the doors. Then they both stood aside, grinning. "It's all yours, just the way it'll look!"

For a moment the only sound was a single, sharp intake of Electra's breath as she clutched Hal's sleeve. Then quickly she moved ahead drawing him with her, but stopped just as abruptly two steps inside the room, her wedding dress swirling to rest about her ankles. Nothing in sight except the walls remained unchanged. The brown rug centered on top the old red carpet, the stuffed rocker and straight oak chairs, the big lamp burning on a shining center table, and even curtains on the windows were all new. Electra looked from one side to the other, then at Hal. "It's—ours! You didn't know either?"

He shook his head. "I couldn't have kept it secret if I had!"

Electra let go his arm and ran and hugged Maggie. "I knew you were

hiding something—but all this! And just what I picked for my sitting room as soon as we had a crop.” She wheeled on Phil, pulled his face down with her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek. “I’ve got the best Mom and Dad in the world!”

Phil was flushing when he stood released. “Mom and the boys get credit,” he said. “I would never have thought of a trick like this.”

“It was Clarence and Shannon,” Maggie said. “They saw you looking at this furniture and planned it all out.”

Electra grabbed for Shannon to kiss him too, but he threw up his arms for protection and ducked behind Clarence. “Now, wait a minute,” he shouted.

As if in terror Clarence also retreated. “Go pick on your old man for that.”

Hal began to laugh, and Electra did not pursue them. “I didn’t want to kiss such guys as you anyway,” she said.

“One thing here is not from us, the chest on the table,” Phil said. “That’s from Grandpa and Grandma Feldtmann.”

Electra took Hal’s hand again and they went to it. She removed the key from the ribbon tied to the hasp, and with the family gathered close turned the lock and raised the walnut lid. Light from the lamp fell upon pieces of ancient silverware imbedded in the rich blue plush. “Oh look!”

In a moment Electra had lifted out the tray and beneath was a tea set to match. Her fingers trembled in haste to seize and hold up the pot. At her shoulder Hal received it from her, but his gaze stayed to watch her flushed face as she removed the sugar bowl and serving tray.

“It’s all too lovely,” she cried.

The family pressed near, picking out a knife or fork or spoon to examine the ornate handles. Clarence bent to read the inscribed plaque inside the lid. “It says: Keyserling and Liebig, Silber—ar—” He broke off then started again to spell out the last word.

“That’s silversmiths,” Phil said.

“And it’s Amsterdam, 1651,” Clarence said. He raised his head and stared at the spoon in his hand. “Why, this st-st-stuff was made before the Revolution!”

“The Feldtmanns stem back to the Dutch colony,” Phil said. “You’ll never polish the silver off these,” he told Electra. “It goes all the way through.”

“I almost wish they hadn’t parted with it,” she said. “It’s such a treasure.”

“It’s still in the family,” Maggie said, “and someday you’ll hand it on again.”

Maggie brought a fresh folded tea towel, and Electra carefully wiped finger marks from each piece touched before it was replaced and locked the case. The boys helped Hal bring the shivaree treats from the cellar where they had been stored—a whole crate of oranges, a bushel sack of mixed nuts, two big wooden buckets of candy, and several boxes of cigars. Bob pressed close to the kitchen table on which the sorting was done, his eyes fascinated by so much sweets.

"Help yourselves, everybody," Hal said as they worked. "There'll still be plenty for the crowd." He chuckled at Bob's quick reach.

The chocolates were interspersed with the hard candy to prevent first guests from choosing the choice bits. Then all was mixed with nuts into dishpans and bowls that were carried into the other room and lined up on the dining table.

"I'll stand by when the time comes," Phil said, "or people will be filling their pockets."

Window shades were drawn tightly, but instead of sitting with the family to await the shivaree crowd, Shannon put on coat and cap and went out to watch down the moonlit road. He came back running. "Lock the doors," he shouted. "They're almost here."

"Goodness," Maggie said, "this soon! We nearly got caught before we were ready."

Phil put Bob to a window to lift a corner of the blind to see the string of buggies, carriages and sleighs turn into the yard and disappear on into gloom of the grove, where teams could be secured to trees. The boy stayed with nose almost touching the cold glass until the dark, shifting mass of the crowd assembled and moved upon the house. He dropped the shade and backed away as the din of yells, horns and whistles broke loose. For a moment he stood with mouth and eyes opened wide as if frightened. Then he saw excitement in the faces of his brothers and laughed with glee. Outside, people were also beating tin pans now and pounding the sides of the house with flat boards. Repeated blasts of shotguns fired into the air beside windows rattled the panes. Bob danced up and down and ran from window to window for peeks at the shadowy figures beyond. Maggie caught at him once as he passed her chair. She missed and raised her voice after him. "Sit down and behave."

"Let him run if he wants to," Phil told her. "He isn't hurting anything." He glanced at her fingers gripping the arm rest as she rocked vigorously. "I believe you're more excited than he is."

"I just hope they don't smash things up out there," she said.

"They won't unless it's by accident."

There came a succession of five heavy shots almost too fast to count,

and Shannon leaped to his feet. "That was Chet Freeman with his automatic, you can bet! I've got a box of shells, and he's going to let me shoot it at Andy's. I won't stop except to let the barrel cool." He whirled upon Hal and Electra. "Wait till Chet and me hunt ducks on the river at your place. We'll keep you in meat!"

"Chet stuffs you full of big hunting ideas, and all he wants is a place to stay at on the river," Maggie said.

"Well, I'll bet we do get a lot of ducks next year. Chet says we'll have the best spot, and he knows." Again there came the rapid fire series of reports. "I sure wish I had a gun like Chet's. I betcha never heard a shivaree as loud as this before."

Hal and Electra laughed back at him. "I've never been inside before when one was going on," she said.

"We'll remember to invite everybody when your turn comes," Hal told him.

"I ain't never going to get married."

"Wait till the right girl gets hold of you," Clarence said.

Intelligible shouts began to come with the noise from outside. "Open up. Let us in."

The demands grew louder and increased in number, and there was pounding on the door. Hal placed his hand on Electra's. "Think they have cheered us long enough? It's the only shivaree party we'll ever have."

She pressed back on his fingers. "I'm ready," she said. They rose to stand side by side for the line to enter and pass by.

Clarence unbolted the front door and Shannon the back for exit, and the shivareers began filing through the house to mumble customary congratulations. There were joking parents, and small children who stretched fingers to the utmost in the bowls of candy treats. In the light of kerosene lamps faces became distinct, bright-eyed girls and awkward, brown youths who reddened under giggling glances as they took the bride's hand to say: "I wish you much joy and happiness." Outside again in groups of their own gender, the boys were at once at ease.

"We ought to go over and pull something on Hal, fix his bed."

"Chet Freeman and some of the fellows have already been there. Shannon was in on it, had a key to the house. They tied a lot of little bells among the bed springs!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

When the last guests shuffled through the rear door, pulling down caps and buttoning coats against the cold, the first out were already climbing into their vehicles or driving out of the yard. Clarence and Shannon left

with the crowd, headed for the Yorks to shivaree Andy; and to the five remaining behind, the house suddenly became very big and almost vacant.

In the first lasting quiet of the day Hal and Electra stood looking into each other's eyes. "I'll help Mom clean up and put things back in order before we leave," Electra said.

"No," Maggie told her. "I'll have all day to straighten up tomorrow. You and Hal just get ready and go."

Phil lighted the lantern and went to the barn with Hal to hitch the team. While they were gone Electra got her coat and muff from the bedroom and brought them near to the stove to warm. This time she buckled on overshoes. By the time the men returned Bob had gone droop-eyed to bed.

"Just a moment," Phil said, as Hal held Electra's coat for her. He went to his desk and then to them where they stood near the door. "Hold out your hand," he said to Electra. He raised Hal's wide, roughened palm to the back of hers and closed the fingers of both of them upon a crisp, ready-signed check for \$100. "Cash is as far as my imagination goes on wedding presents. The furniture was from Mom and the kids."

"Golly, thank you!" Hal said.

Maggie had approached behind Phil. She took Electra's face between her hands and kissed her on first one cheek then the other. She and Phil walked out into the yard with the couple and watched them drive away.

Maggie put her hand into Phil's as they went back to the house. Inside before the stove, she withdrew her fingers to take her handkerchief from her apron pocket and dabbed her eyes. "She's broken the ice," she said. "I suppose they'll all follow."

Phil put his arm about her shoulders. "That's the way of the world. I hate to lose her, too, Mom; but I'd rather see her marry than go like some girls."

Maggie nodded and managed a smile. "I hope they have the good luck to go on always as happy as they are now."

Phil squeezed her tightly against his side before he released her and sat down to unlace his shoes. Slowly one after the other he let each drop with a thump and motionless for a moment afterwards stared at the linoleum. "You don't see that they're growing up until they start to drift away from you."

"Yes," she said. "Next year it will be Shannon gone to town to high school, if he doesn't change his mind again."

"He won't. It took him this year around home after graduation to get lonesome for it. Inside him he likes school." Phil got up and walked around the stove in his sock feet, removed the lid, punched the embers

and closed the draft. Then he sat down again. "I wish Clarence were going also."

"He doesn't need more schooling to farm," Maggie said.

"Just the same it is something to help him all his life," Phil said. "I've tried to tell him that, but he can't see it. He never would listen to a damned thing from me, and if he doesn't want an education, that's up to him. I told him he could have it, or the cost in money if he was determined not to go on. But I'm going to hold off on paying him until it will do him the most good. Right now he'd like as not blow it for a new horse and buggy."

"Don't you think we ought to start letting them have a say on running things?" Maggie asked. "Clarence especially, he's coming eighteen now since last month."

Phil saw her avoid his gaze and knew she was thinking of his quarrel with Clarence. He scowled. "Has he been complaining to you?"

"Not exactly, but I can see they aren't always satisfied, either of them. They think we'd get ahead faster if we changed work with neighbors instead of keeping so much to ourselves, and if we had more cows and an extra team."

"Yes, and time they get that, they'll want riding plows, a cream separator and God knows what else. They want to tell *me* how to farm. I've been through the mill. These new machines cost money."

"We've got the farm for Hal paid for and some left in the bank."

"We're well off because we've watched corners and saved all our lives," Phil said. "And who would milk the extra cows, pa and mom?"

"Now, Phillip, you know they are good boys to work."

"Yes, they'll work," he admitted. "But you'll spoil them for it. I know what they're figuring on about an extra team and it isn't for field work. They want an excuse to take Fanny and Prince back onto the road. You'd have them gadding helter-skelter over the country after girls before they're dry behind the ears!"

"We got married," Maggie said.

Now the reminder irritated Phil. "All right, let them walk; plenty of other people's children do. If a girl wants to go with a boy very bad, she won't hold off because he hasn't a fine driving team."

Maggie's eyes slowly filled. "I don't want them like other children. Most all parents were terribly strict and their children didn't turn out well."

"Do you think they would be any better if they had had their own way?"

"I don't know, but there must be something wrong. My brothers

both drink and Douglas gambles. Virginia doesn't get along with her man and talks of leaving him. They're not the only ones. It seems people kept so busy making money and working the young folks so hard to pay for more land, they didn't have time left to teach them to be the right kind of men and women. I want to be proud of my sons."

This time it was Phil, who avoided her gaze, recognizing his own words often uttered turned back upon him: "These folks know how to raise cattle and hogs, but do a damned poor job on their own kids!" Instead of answering Maggie, he spat his chewed-out tobacco quid violently into the hearth and banged the door shut over the ashes. He rose and tramped to the water bucket at the sink to rinse his mouth and take a bedtime drink. When he came back he stopped before her as she also rose.

"All right, have it as you please," he said. "Tell them to pick out a driving team for theirs, and I'll buy it; and as soon as this year's crop is harvested, Clarence can take over field work to show how well he can manage things. He'll have to learn someday."

The corners of Maggie's mouth trembled into a smile. "That will make him so proud! He'll work harder than ever trying; they both will. And maybe being busier and going to high school will stop Shannon running with that Chester Freeman." Then her expression clouded somewhat. "I wish we could persuade him from playing football. I'm afraid he'll get hurt."

"You let Shannon alone," Phil said. "He'll take care of himself. Clarence is the one with girls on the brain, and if he gets into trouble running around, don't send him belly-aching to me. He'll have to take his own medicine."

Chapter 29

On Wednesday afternoon that began Shannon's first Thanksgiving vacation from high school, he went visiting to Electra's for a late season try at duck hunting. In the year that had passed since the wedding he had turned sixteen. He would never be tall. Yet his shoulders had already widened to man size, and evidence of sandy beard had appeared on his chin and back sides of his cheeks. His face had kept the fairness of childhood with a skin the summer sun burned red but could not tan and freckles which grew more golden with every year.

Shannon made the trip by horseback, riding one of the slender gray geldings Phil had bought as a driving team. It was still an hour before

sunset when Electra saw him turn into the yard alone and came out on the porch to greet him.

"Where's Chet Freeman? You said he was coming with you."

"He'll come over from Uncle Dean's after a while." Shannon stopped beside her and slipped from the saddle. "He had to take his dad to sit up with him. He turned worse today, and Dr. MacGregor said they should keep somebody by his bed. They've sent for Andy."

"It's sure too bad about Uncle Dean, lying there, and they say he can never get well," said Electra.

"It can't be helped. Isn't Hal home?"

"He's at Haeckel's helping thresh."

Shannon handed his shotgun, case and all, to Electra to be taken into the house and led his horse to the stable. The cows heard him moving inside and mooed from the corral. He let them in, gave them their hay and went for milk pails. "I'll do up the chores for you, Sis."

In the barn as he worked, Shannon's disappointment rose at Chet's absence which meant no hunting that evening. If I had known sooner I could have come by buggy with his decoys and gone to the blind by myself, he thought—but at the same time he knew most of the fun would have been lost without his friend. Why couldn't his dad have gone to Uncle Dean's some other night?

Of all the family, Shannon had been most elated by Phil's purchase of Hal's river farm. Of its 300 acres a third was wasteland sand dunes bordering either side of a loop in the stream and grown up into willow thickets scattered with stunted cottonwoods.

"We'll have a mile of river bend all to ourselves!" Shannon had boasted to Chet. During the spring migration there had been crop planting to keep Shannon from hunting, but on summer fishing trips to the bend much of their talk had been of the coming autumn. Since boyhood the two had tramped long winter trap lines in partnership, and it was on the last Fourth of July that they had won fifty dollars between them at a blue rock shoot.

"Nobody knows us yet at that match they're having at West Bend," Chet said. "We can get there early and sign up for all the matches before the shooting starts. Just so we aren't on any of the same ones together to shoot against each other. That way we can both use my shotgun. It's a better one."

Sitting in the stable's dim interior with his strong wrists rhythmically pulsing milk streams into the bucket squeezed between his knees, Shannon lost count of time and cows in re-living that hot afternoon when

again and again he had gone to the line of posts pitted against four grown men and returned victorious.

There were fine pictures of Chet at his post, calmly pulling down his hat brim before he leveled his weapon. Long limbed and rawboned like his father, Chet leaned forward into his gun and overtook sharp angles in a deliberate sweep carried through to make him look like a swiveling statue.

Shannon rose with a full milk pail and hung it on the peg behind him. He sat down with an empty bucket to the next cow—still thinking of that wonderful day at the shooting match.

Home from the shooting match with his share of the winnings he had spent the money on a new shotgun the next time in town, an automatic exactly like Chet's.

"You'll see a better use than that some day for forty dollars," Phil had said, when Shannon brought the weapon home from the hardware store and displayed it to the family.

"Chet says it's the best kind made."

"That Chester Freeman can talk you into anything," Maggie said. "You'll never save if you're like him."

"Well, it is the best. If I take good care of it, it'll last me all my life."

All summer he had polished the walnut stock and forearm daily, and weeks before any duck flights could be expected the two boys had gone to the river and dug a pit for their blind to be framed with willows. "This way there won't be a pile of fresh dirt to look suspicious when a flock gets to circling," Chet had said. Next he had chosen a hidden spot for his tent.

Yet over Shannon's bright hunting anticipations there was the high school shadow. He wanted to be among the many and to play football, both as strongly as he wanted to hunt; and once enrolled with arrangements for board and room, he was committed in Phil's eyes. He must attend every day, with no exceptions for cold snaps that brought geese circling with clamor above town lights until he tramped about his rooming house like a jailed man. Each weekend in their blind Chet had new stories of his past five days, but somehow there were never any heavy flights when Shannon was on hand.

"Too many people hunt on Saturdays and Sundays, and they got no judgment on ranges," Chet said. "They shoot at ducks a mile high and scare 'em out of the country. Hell, if I was you I'd cut school when a good day comes. You could slip out to my tent, and your folks would never know. I'll come after you anytime."

"I'll telephone you at Electra's sometime," Shannon said.

"I'd sure go while you still can," Chet said. "One of these days the damned government will regulate us with seasons. They're talking of it, and then we'll only get to hunt part of the time."

Although Chet had lived on the river until cold weather forced him to break camp, Shannon never left classes to join him. He hated himself for not being able to play hookey; but he knew that though he managed to keep it hidden from Phil, most of the fun would be spoiled. So instead he had counted the days to Thanksgiving vacation, and now Chet was detained. Damn it to hell.

After he had finished milking, Shannon lingered among his brother-in-law's livestock, stroking the fat, sleek flanks of the cattle. The horses stretched heads across the mangers to nuzzle his shoulder when he carried the milk along the feedway before their stalls, and he set the buckets down to pet them, for of all animals he loved horses best.

When he had taken up the pails again and gone with them to the house he spoke of the animals to Electra. "You've got the nicest stock I've ever seen, all fat as butter. Even the colts rub up against you tame as house cats."

"That's Hal's doings," she said. "He plays with them and carries oats in his pockets when he goes out in the pasture so they'll follow him around. I can't keep sugar in the house unless I hide it since our Dolly mare foaled twins! He won't hardly go visiting on Sundays, rather be home currying and brushing his horses or oiling his harness. He'd sit up all night reading his farm bulletins and magazines if I didn't see that he got his sleep."

"How is his new alfalfa hay crop turning out?"

"He has a good thick stand, but we won't know till next year's cuttings whether cattle will eat it. Hal says if they won't he can plow it under and still come out ahead. He planted it on our poorest sandy field. He says it adds something to the soil good for corn. I don't pretend to understand."

Shannon filled the washpan, but he sniffed toward the stove before he bent to soap his face. "Smells like fried chicken!"

"It's a young rooster from a hen that stole her nest out late."

Shannon was listening for Chet's buggy and heard it arriving. He ran back out at once to help his friend unhitch.

Electra greeted Chet as one of the family. He had come regularly to the house for water while encamped on the river, bringing ducks and squirrels or catfish from his live box, and had lost most of his diffidence before her. The boys washed together at the sink and wiped on the roller towel hung on the door.

Electra finished her cooking and set the pans far back on the stove to

stay warm. She looked at Shannon and Chet where they sat down, dividing the daily paper. "I guess Hal is going to be late. He told me he might be if they tried to finish at Haeckel's. If you boys are hungry we can eat without him."

"Don't bother, Sis," Shannon said, without looking up from football scores. "We'll wait. It'll be jollier all together."

Electra lighted a second lamp and went to spread extra quilts on the bed in the spare room where they would sleep. While she was gone the screen door slammed, and when she returned to the kitchen the paper lay in a discarded heap, and there was a cold draft coming in through the door left standing wide. She crossed over to close it, and Shannon called to her from the yard.

"It's geese! Come out and listen to them. We think they're circling the bend."

Electra went as far as the steps and stood shivering, her hands folded under her apron. The outcries faded away to the west and she retreated inside.

It was a while before the boys came in. "They came back and then flew on east," Shannon said. "Gee, I wish they'd have lit!"

"It was an awfully big flock, maybe too big," Chet said. He sat down but raised the window to listen. In speaking he sounded calm, but there was a special glint in his eyes; and when he heard the flock pass again he turned to Shannon: "Let's get our boots and go down there."

"You're not going to run off to the river this time of night?" Electra said. "Hal will be back any time now."

"We won't be gone long," Shannon said.

"But you won't be able to see anything."

"If they came real close we might," Chet said. "The moon is strong." They hustled into sweaters and coats and filled the magazines of their shotguns beside the kitchen lamp, reading cartridge loads individually before slipping them home.

Electra crossed the room after them to close the door they again forgot to shut. She heard the rattle of bolts as shells were thrown into the breeches, but already they were out of sight. "Foolishness! Those two together will never grow up," she murmured.

Outside, Chet and Shannon were running toward the river, for the outcries of the geese were approaching anew. They had a quarter mile to go, and the sounds swept past and faded away up the river valley. The clip-clop, clip-clop of their boots beat out the double rhythm of a steady dog trot on the solid trail.

They arrived at the stream breathing hard and stopped to listen. Save

for grinding of slush ice drifting in the open channel mid-stream, the night had assumed arctic stillness.

Chet scrambled down the bank with Shannon close after him and walked out upon the sand bar as far as the edge of the ice. The bar was frozen hard as pavement and barren of cover. Chet looked all about them, at the same time listening. "I wish we could wait out here in the middle, but against all this white sand and ice they'd see us sure." He reclinced a jutting point of bank where prairie bluestem had grown thick and waist high to the very edge. They entered the grass which was white with frost. It powdered off on their clothing like flour and got inside Shannon's gloves around the wrists where his arms had outgrown his coat sleeves. Concealed, he looked about him and saw the whole vague landscape a-glitter with frost. Its tiny particles settling out of the air sent tinselly sparkles through the mistiness of the moonlight.

"We could see them quite a ways if they only come again," Chet said.

"If we knew they lit upstream, one of us could go scare them up," Shannon suggested.

Chet shook his head. "We don't know, and if they did somebody else has probably heard them and is after them already."

Chet had lowered his voice almost to a whisper, and Shannon took the cue for silence. If they only would come back, he thought. If it was Chet alone they would—and the whole flock light right under his gun barrel! Nothing like that ever happens when I'm along. Then Shannon began to picture to himself just what he would do if the geese did return. He had them approach perfectly, low across the sandbar with white cheek markings growing clear on dark heads. Their great wings were first set, then cupped with feet extended to land; and he saw the leading gander, biggest of them all, collapse at his first shot. The thrill and power of the imagined scene began to leave him, however, when the cold crept in through his clothing. Might as well give up and go home. I wouldn't get a shot in a thousand years.

Yet with a duck hunter's persistence Chet stayed; and while Shannon stood hunched and shivering beside him, growing more miserable by the minute, in the distance the silence was broken by the sudden, confused outcries of terrified geese taking wing. Punctuating the commotion were two swift shots. "I knew it!" said Chet.

Shannon felt him grow tense in listening to the clamor which settled into regular honking. It grew clearer, and Shannon's own words rose in a harsh whisper on a rush of air from his throat. "They're coming our direction, by God they are!"

He felt Chet's hand on his shoulder and dropped with him onto one

knee without feeling the frost the movement showered down the back of his neck. The chattering of his teeth had stopped but his hands and legs, that had turned tinglingly warm, began to tremble again worse than they had from cold. To steady them he leaned harder on his gun held upright, butt on the ground.

The music continued to come stronger and stronger. It was a mixed flock with short, shrill notes of white brants among the bass pitch of Canadian ganders. Would they be too high? He waited and waited, straining his eyes.

At last a smudge of white drifted out of the sky above scrubby cottonwoods up river to the westward, and Chet's voice breathed into his ear almost like a hiss. "Don't move. For God's sake, not a muscle!" Out of the smudge a lengthening phosphorescent line took form, broken but stretching across the river from bank to bank with ends trailing to form a shallow arc. The voices blended and rang upon the cold, still brilliance of the night.

Shannon's heartbeats shook his body. Again Chet's whisper floated into his ear: "Wait 'em out. Wait 'em out! They never get too close." Shannon's cocked knee threatened to wobble back and forth under his elbow to his left hand which was clinching the forearm of his weapon like a vise.

Gray blotches became distinguishable in the white line, filling in what had appeared to be gaps. These dark forms were largest. Out in front a concentration of them loomed directly above as a dusky mass. All unconsciously Shannon's forefinger released the safety and nestled back inside the trigger guard. "That's good enough!" said Chet, and still crouched they thrust their guns upward together.

The muzzle flashes of repeated shots and the streams of fire streaking skyward held more of devouring terror to the geese than the reports. The lowest birds flounced upward, colliding with those above. Wings clashed and beat ruthlessly as other geese following behind the leaders were carried forward by their momentum into the confusion. The honking which had been a chorus changed into a din. Several times geese fell, crashing into the tall grass.

Shannon found himself pulling desperately on a trigger which refused to go. With a curse he brought the gun down to correct the failure and found the breech standing open; he had fired the magazine empty.

The flock broke up and veered, but a crippled goose, circling crazily, sailed low over their heads and, landing out of range on the sand bar, began to flop and flounder. Chet dropped a fresh cartridge into his chamber and scrambled down the bank in pursuit. Shannon followed, frantically reloading as he went. The wounded bird squalled his fear at Chet's run-

ning approach and attracted a bewildered brant lost from the flock. It came from behind and almost overhead veered sharply. "Get him! Get him!" yelled Chet from far out in front. Shannon stopped dead in his tracks and shot twice at the white blotch as it went by. It struck the frozen bar with a thud. Remorselessly Chet turned his own gun upon the squalling cripple which crumpled and lay still.

For succeeding moments Shannon dashed hither and thither helping gather the kill. "Wait till I see Clarence now," he shouted over and over. "Wait'll I tell him about this!" And when they had finished and had looked at the pile, they reached out and elatedly shook hands.

Honking still sounded from several directions, but it was growing distant, fading out.

When they trudged into the farmyard later, each with his load of geese slung half on either side of his shoulder, Hal was home, for the grain wagon stood before the barn. "Let's burst in and surprise them," Shannon said, and they stole up onto the porch; but a glance through the window changed their intentions. Hal had only just entered the house, for he had not yet removed coat or cap. Mittens protruded from his side pockets. He stood behind Electra with arms around her, and she was gazing up at him with head tilted back against his shoulder. As they looked she raised her hands caressingly to the stubbly cheeks, and Hal bent and kissed her. The boys grinned broadly at each other, yet with a trifle of disdain. Married a whole year and still silly as sweethearts! Shannon reached back, pushed the screen door open and let it bang shut. They took a moment to scuff their boots; and when they opened the door, Hal was hanging his coat on a peg in the corner, and Electra was at the stove, forking sizzling, crusted chicken loose from the skillet.

Shannon entered first, turning half around to exhibit all his load. "See what we did!"

Electra set down the skillet with a clatter, and Hal's mouth opened slack. "Holy mackerel!" he said.

They came over to help untie the heads bound together for carrying, and laid the geese out side by side on newspapers spread on the floor before the woodbox. There were eight in all, seven lusty Canadians and the snowy brant, slimmer but beautiful with its black tipped wings. Hal, who cared little for hunting, became genuinely aroused when he hefted the splendid birds, the first he had ever seen brought in.

"Living as near as I do to the river, I'm going to buy a gun and keep my eyes peeled," he said. "I had no idea anything wild grew so big." He picked up the largest a second time. "Why this son-of-a-gun will weigh ten pounds!"

"I sure shot fast," Shannon said. "Emptied my gun before I knew it. I could have shot twice as many shells if it had held them!"

After supper the men withdrew to the living room to chairs on either side of the heater—Hal with pipe and paper, Shannon and Chet taking down their guns with cleaning rods and oil can between them on the floor. Although Shannon had talked of nothing else during the meal, he went through another description of the shooting, details of which were already growing and taking on color. "We ought to get extension magazines," he said suddenly to Chet.

Chet shook his head. "The extra weight off-balances a gun, and you might over-heat your barrel, too. Besides"—he paused almost solemnly—"we'll never see the likes of anything so perfect as tonight happen again."

By and by odor of singeing feathers drifted to them. They had finished with their firearms and stood them in the corner. Shannon winked at Hal. "Having any luck, Sis?" he called.

"Not too much," Electra said. "They pick darn hard, I can tell you. I've only finished with one."

"You don't know how. It's all in a simple twist of the wrist."

"You can come and start twisting anytime, all three of you."

The boys laughed and obeyed, drawn irresistibly toward the kitchen scene of their triumph. Hal followed to help and join in any teasing.

"This could have taken all night if we'd got any more," Shannon said, after a few minutes over his bird.

"It's easier if you pull down on the feathers instead of up as on ducks," Chet told him, and mention of ducks set Shannon off again.

"Maybe these came in ahead of a blizzard that will bring us a big flight of mallards tomorrow!"

Chapter 30

Shannon got to hunt only two mornings with Chet. Maggie telephoned for him to come home and help do chores, because Phil had been asked to sit up with Uncle Dean.

When Phil arrived at the Yorks that evening he found the sick bed moved into the living room beside the stove. Old Dean lay on his back. His eyes were a little way open, but he did not stir when Phil approached and stood looking at him or when he said, "Hello, Uncle Dean." The sheet across his chest under the armpits looked very white against his

yellow cast, and the bony skeleton of his shoulders and arms protruded fleshless under the skin.

Emma York followed Phil back to the kitchen. "He's failed since you saw him last, hasn't he?"

"Yes, I'm afraid he's much thinner," Phil said.

"'Tain't no wonder. He hasn't eaten anything since a spell of vomiting and stomach cramps last Tuesday, except a little broth twice a day. Dr. MacGregor puts something in his arm with a needle now every time he comes, and that helps him because he sleeps good for a while. Yesterday he left a new kind of white pills for when he feels that terrible pain in his side, and since then he hasn't complained very much."

Emma looked into Phil's eyes as she talked. The suffering he saw and her sallowness of face made him think of Maggie's prediction as he was leaving. "I expect she'll join him soon after he goes. She looks like a walking corpse, poor soul." Phil swallowed and took her hand.

"Why didn't you call me sooner?"

"It's only this week he's been this bad, and you've done so much running errands for us this fall. Jim has been over every day, and John Freeman came. Then last night Ezra Karns was here. Andy is back, too, from Nebraska. He's come home to stay."

"He's here—now?"

"He left after chores to take Mr. Karns home. He should have been back quite a while ago."

When they heard the team, Phil put on coat and cap and went to meet Andy. The two pulled off mittens and shook hands beside the buggy.

"Aunt Emma told me you were back," Phil said. "Didn't Vivian come?"

"She wanted to spend Christmas with her family—unless we have to call her sooner. It'll be her last chance if we're going to farm the home place. I liked Hastings and the implement business, and I've been working with Bryan. But I can't let Mother live in this house alone, and she doesn't want to leave it."

"I see," Phil said.

"I had a talk with him about coming home," Andy went on. "Bryan is organizing clubs for young Democrats up there and wants a program of the same kind in Kansas. I told him I'd go to work on it."

Phil had no answer for Andy's disappointment. A Democrat Party in Kansas meant building all the way from the ground up.

They went about unhitching and putting away the horses. "I hope Mom hasn't fretted that I was gone too long," Andy said. "I stayed to

help Ez milk because he'd been with us all day and night. Oscar was home but drunk again. He's put his foot into it this time, tied himself up with the army. He got to drinking with a recruiting sergeant who had been in Cuba, too, and that was all he remembered. Mrs. Karns had got him to go to bed. She showed me his orders to see if I knew how to get him out of it. I told them I thought you could buy a discharge for three hundred dollars. Ez said if he was worth that much to the government they could keep him, that he wasn't worth three cents at home. Sary started to bawl, but she didn't faze old Ez. He said he'd got him out of trouble for the last time, and he washed his hands of him. Maybe the army could straighten him out."

"Well, maybe it can," Phil said.

"I don't know. I feel sorry for the damned cuss—and not just for saving me at San Juan. He's near forty and will find infantry discipline a lot different from the Rough Riders. I felt sorry for the whole family, especially Sary. She's always had a mess. Ez has done about everything a man could do to make himself disliked, and yet you couldn't find a more obliging neighbor when somebody is sick."

Andy closed the barn doors tight, and at the house they piled fuel boxes high in both kitchen and living room, for wind and clouds were rising out of the north with sundown. Emma sat with them at the table and picked a little at the supper lunch she had set out. After she had had her coffee, they sent her at once to bed.

As soon as she had gone, Andy started to carry the dishes to the sink, but Phil took the plates out of his hand. "I'll attend to these—it's all I have to do. You get some rest same as her. You've had a big day on top of your train ride last night, and first thing you know you'll be sick yourself."

Andy walked to the living room doorway and stood and looked in at his father, who had not moved since they entered the house. "I suppose I had better sleep a little, or try to," he said when he came back. "He had his pills at six and should sleep through to midnight. You can call me then to take your place. Dr. MacGregor ought to be coming about that time. He had some other calls to make out this way."

"I'll see how sleepy I get," Phil told him.

With dishes done Phil softly closed the doors left ajar to both sleeping rooms and took a rocker beside the bed. The household settled into complete silence save for the slow, harsh breathing of the sick man. For an hour and then another and another, there was nothing else except the clock and a fitful pecking of sleet against window panes. The lamp wick had been turned low to prevent glare, and the room was too dim

for reading. Phil's eyelids began to droop and his chin nodded toward his chest.

He aroused with a jerk when Dean stirred for the first time. He opened and closed his mouth, raised an arm limply and let it flop down. There were troubled, incoherent mutterings. His eyelids fluttered apart, and he sat half up as if to arise. Phil rose quickly, but he had already dropped back onto the mattress.

Phil bent to him. "Uncle Dean?" There was no answer, and Phil wanted him to know surely that he was not alone. "It's me, Phil," he said softly. "Can you hear me?" He had sat back when unexpectedly the old man's eyes opened fully. "Where's Emma and Andy?"

"They are getting a little rest."

"Good."

Dean lay completely inert with his gaze on Phil as though his body were still sleeping apart from his mind. "I'm glad you came. Don't let Andy give up politics for me."

In abrupt comprehension of his troubled thoughts, Phil leaned forward, and the falsehood he spoke for comfort rose spontaneously to his lips. "Andy doesn't want to go back to politics, Uncle Dean."

Dean searched his face. Light brightened his faded eyes, making him so resemble Andy that Phil felt he had not really spoken falsely, and he heard himself fervently adding. "He has come home to the land."

An almost tender smile overspread the old man's face, meant clearly for Phil as well as for Andy. "It's a good life," he said.

Phil gazed at the seamed, hollowed countenance, seer-like in the face of departure, and looked back to an unpainted house of but two rooms in an empty, snow-clad plain. The house had grown and the plains filled as predicted; and the same counsel given then in greeting had been offered now in goodbye. Dean's eyes closed and in a little while the smile faded, but into Phil's throat rose a lump not to be swallowed away for a long interval.

Later, when Dean stirred again his face puckered and lost its peace. "Do you want to try lying on your side, Uncle Dean?" Phil asked. This time there was no response, but though Dean continued unconscious, the muscles of his face and neck kept twitching. As more and more effects of the morphine wore off, he rolled his head and began to moan. Phil took out his handkerchief and making a pad wiped standing drops of sweat that came out on Dean's forehead. I could turn him, if I knew he would rest easier, but I might only hurt him. I will give him more pills when I'm sure he's awake to swallow. Phil straightened the disarranged covers smooth and

close. He sat on the edge of the bed and stroked the bald head until it became motionless in the pillow. He was relieved to see the headlights of Dr. MacGregor's automobile swing into the yard.

Phil listened for sounds from the family awakened by noise of the engine, but Andy's snoring in the next room continued, and there was no movement from the L-annex where Aunt Emma slept.

MacGregor entered without knocking. He nodded familiarly to Phil and set his satchel on the table. "I was wondering who I would find sitting up tonight." He removed his fur cap and got out of his long, horsehide coat, beat them together over the wood box. There was a rattle of ice pellets falling among the sticks. "The roads are getting nasty, freezing slick. I had to creep along."

"I was afraid you might not be able to make it," Phil said.

"Has he complained a good deal?"

"He hasn't been fully awake except for a couple minutes early in the night, but a while ago he had a spell of tossing and moaning."

As soon as MacGregor had rubbed his hands warm over the stove he unclipped his thermometer from his breast pocket and gave it a couple vigorous shakes. He held it to the lamp, turning it in his fingers. The light struck his face, pointing up the loose jowls of his cheeks and the darkness of sleepless hours under his red-rimmed eyes. His stomach had grown steadily with the years and sagged below his vest.

"Doc, I don't know how you can keep going," Phil said.

MacGregor smiled faintly. "Sometimes I don't know myself, but I have to." He turned to the bed.

"I've kept a pot of coffee hot for you."

"Good."

MacGregor inserted the glass tube into Dean's slack mouth. He held it in place under the tongue and with the other hand took the pulse in the thin wrist while waiting for the mercury to rise.

"I was afraid he might strangle if I tried to give him more medicine," Phil said. "He hasn't had any since six o'clock."

MacGregor nodded, counting mentally. He removed the thermometer and backed up to the lamp to read it. "Well, he hasn't any fever." He wiped the instrument and returned it to his pocket. "He's resting now, and I'll let him sleep as long as he will before I check him."

They went into the kitchen and drew up chairs across the corner of the oilcloth table from each other, with the coffeepot in handy reach of them on the stove and MacGregor where he could keep watch on his patient through the doorway. He cooled his first cup black in the saucer and gulped it, poured another and let it set.

"They sent me his report from the clinic where they cut him open the second time last summer," he said. "The growth had come back and was in his liver. There was nothing they could do but sew him up again. I've never told him exactly, and they didn't there. Only to come home and rest and enjoy himself. I did tell the family."

"He knows it too," Phil said. "He has never said so directly to me, but I can tell that he does."

MacGregor pursed his lips in foregone agreement. "He couldn't help knowing it now, for he can feel the lumps himself. It's spread all over inside."

With the back of his hand Phil cleared away a blur of tears that sprang to his lashes. "It's the God damnedest shame I know of!"

They sipped in silence until Dean stirred, and at his first movement they got up quickly. This time when he opened his eyes he was gasping and his tongue failed in his effort to greet Phil. MacGregor bent across into his field of vision.

"How are you feeling?"

On him Dean's gaze fastened itself in desperate hope of relief. "My God, Doc—give—me—something!"

MacGregor extended his hand to Phil for the water glass. "Quickly, while he's able to swallow," he said. He lifted Dean's head and as he opened his mouth placed two tiny white tablets far back on his tongue. Dean gulped fiercely from the tumbler held to his lips and strangled. The tablets flew out mixed with saliva as he began to cough, and he writhed with the jarring, clutching with his nails at the bedclothes over his stomach. MacGregor held him until he subsided and then immediately gave him a hypodermic. Afterwards he continued to stand beside the bed, but Phil sat down and kept his face turned away.

Fright and nausea which had swept up into Phil with Dean's agony gradually declined as the sufferer slipped again into stupor.

MacGregor moved the lamp near and screwed up the flame. He turned back the quilts. "I can examine him now. He won't feel it."

When Phil looked he could not again avert his gaze. Below the gaunt rib framework of chest, the abdomen was puffed like a great pumpkin, and along the right hand side there was a ridge, mottled and inflamed. MacGregor went round and round that area of thickened tissue with his finger tips then across it. "This is where it will break through," he said.

"He can't last that long, can he!"

"Who can say? The body clings to life. He was a healthy man for his age otherwise, and he has a powerful heart. That's all against him now." MacGregor bent back to pressing, thumping, listening.

"You'll keep him doped, won't you, Doc?"

"That's what I've been doing. The trouble with morphine is it requires heavier and heavier doses, and I'm already giving the strongest shots he dare have." MacGregor finished and straightened up, but he still stood by the bed gazing down at his patient.

"He's my Uncle and best friend, but I wish to God he would go soon!"

MacGregor turned at the outburst and looked steadily at Phil's white face and trembling mustache. "I know you do," he said. He drew the covers over Dean gently, moved up a chair, and sat at Phil's side. He let his hand rest briefly on Phil's shoulder before he leaned back his heavy head and closed his eyes tightly as if shutting out the world. Moments later without opening his eyes he began to talk.

"To die is nothing; yet people look to me to prevent it. I have seen dozens of men and women leave this world. I can't save them all and the most I do for anybody is put it off a while. We have to leave to make way for the little fellers. It's as endless and natural as seeing them born, and the important thing is knowing how to die. It is harder to watch children go, because it seems it isn't their turn yet; but I've thought that maybe they were better off than we who stayed. I'm not afraid to die, and no man need be. But when I think that I may go as Dean is now, lingering through hopeless misery—that scares me."

Still without opening his eyes, MacGregor ceased, and remained silent and relaxed so long that Phil wondered if he had dozed. A strange stillness seemed to be stealing into the house. When MacGregor did stir, he got up abruptly and went back to Dean. He spent an hour over him in meticulous examination, and when he had folded up his stethoscope he took a turn about the room and stood for a little while at the window, hands behind him, staring out into the blankness of night. On the mantel the clock struck slowly four times. As if the measured sounds had settled a discord within him, MacGregor turned and strode to his frayed satchel. Phil watched him fill his hypodermic needle and go straight to the bed. One of Dean's arms lay ready exposed outside the covers. MacGregor raised it and held it, looking down into the still face. "He is one of the few completely honorable men I have known," he said. Then he inserted the needle and pressed the plunger. From force of habit he again rubbed the puncture area gently with disinfected cotton before he turned away.

"There is no need my staying longer." His eyes and Phil's met. "He will gradually sleep sounder and sounder," MacGregor went on. "About daybreak you should awaken the family and have them call the other son to come over."

Part V From Outside the Plains' Horizons

Chapter 31

Two years after the death of Dean York, Clarence Garwood married and in the September following Phil's first grandchild was born. Clarence had telephoned for Maggie and Electra to come, and as soon as Dr. MacGregor delivered the baby Maggie rang Phil. "Hello, Grandpa!" she cried. "It's a girl, Clara, seven pounds, with black eyes like you and her daddy!"

Phil sent with Andy next morning for the biggest, fluffiest teddy bear in town. "She'll read about Roosevelt in history books," he said, "and may as well have one of his damned bears."

Andy laughed but spoke seriously. "If Teddy and Taft split their ticket, we may see a Democrat elected. Bryan and Party leaders are thinking along that line. I was to the state conference and appointed central committeeman. I'll need your help for the campaign."

"I'll work on the plans with you, but I don't care to go out actively any more," Phil said. "Maybe in another state I'd feel differently, but Kansas will stay Republican regardless."

"We can't expect to carry the whole state, but there has been some swing in sentiment our way," Andy told him. "We have organization enough in the new clubs to make a good fight and elect some representatives, maybe the Governor."

In the afternoon Clarence's mother-in-law came to take Maggie's place, and Phil drove over to see the baby and bring Maggie home. He handed the teddy bear to Clarence. "This is for Clara, and here is a little check to start her a bank account."

The proud grin that had been wide on Clarence's face broadened. "Gee! Thanks, Dad."

When Phil and Maggie left, Clarence accompanied them to the buggy. "Take care of that girl," Maggie told him. "The rest may all be boys."

She put her hand on Phil's as they drove from the yard with tears in her eyes when they looked at each other.

Phil gripped her fingers in fright. "Isn't their baby normal?" he demanded.

"Why, of course! Perfect."

"Well then, what are you blubbering about?" He relaxed his hand. "You scared hell out of me for a second."

Maggie wiped her eyes dry. "The whole thing reminded me so much of our first one."

Phil stared at her. His mind flew back to the barren kitchen to which he had rushed from the train station, and to the bed pushed beside the cook stove. "God knows why it should," he said.

"They're both so proud, and yet I know that ahead of time they didn't want a baby so soon. That's just like it was with us."

"It'll work out if they don't have more right along," Phil said.

"I still wish Clarence had married almost anyone else than a Carter," Maggie said. "You should have seen the mess their house was in. Electra and I worked like mad to get it clean ahead of the doctor. Clarence will never get ahead very fast with Effie for a wife. I tried once to talk to him when he started going steady with her. 'You're a nice looking man,' I told him. 'You could do better. Her folks have only a rough eighty with a mortgage hanging over it.'"

Phil's eyebrows raised in disapproval. "What did he say?"

"He said he didn't care. It was his business! I hope he never tells Effie."

"So do I. You said too much, and boys don't like being told."

"I didn't think I said more than I should. I was afraid he'd turn down our farm to rent and move off somewhere by himself. You know that time he threatened to leave home—" Maggie hesitated and looked anxiously at the side of Phil's face, for it was the first time she had mentioned the quarrel. "Clarence really started to go."

Phil smiled faintly. "I know. I was watching him from the grove. If he hadn't turned of his own accord, I'd have called him back. Clarence has a streak of my own bullheadedness and some extra from your dad, but I've found I can go to him man to man. That was the way I got him to move to our farm. 'It can be a home you can be sure will not be rented out from under you,' I told him. 'I know you think it's too close and I'll be interfering, but I won't. We've had our differences, but when I promise a thing you know I do it. You can farm anyway you please, whatever crops you please. If you watch your corners and save, you can own that quarter someday when the estate is settled. We'll help you to the same start we gave Electra, and I'll pay you now that thousand dollars I promised instead of high school. But if you get into debt and go broke,

you'll have to find your own way out.' Well, sir, he just listened and looked me back straight in the eyes and said: 'On that basis I'll rent your farm.' "

They picked peaches in the orchard after they reached home. Under a tree loaded with yellow Elbertas, Phil set their basket down near his own feet. He selected his fruit deliberately. Maggie picked with both hands into her apron, knotted by the corners to her waist-band to form a sack. "It doesn't seem fair that Clarence and Effie got their baby before they were ready while Hal and Electra don't have any," she said. "It hurt me to see the longing in Electra's face while she helped wash Effie's and put the dress on it. And the way she kept cuddling it when she held it! She told me Dr. MacGregor had found out what was wrong with her, a tipped uterus he called it. He's going to have a specialist make a brace for her to wear inside her at night. So maybe she and Hal will have a family after a while now."

"It'll be a shame if they never can," Phil said. "Hal's so crazy about kids. It can get awful lonely for two people to grow old by themselves."

Maggie looked quickly at him over a branch and watched him turn a peach in his hand, condemn it for worminess and toss it aside. She took a long breath, hesitated a moment, and then reached for more peaches.

"Bob'll soon be our only one left," Phil went on, "and he'll be in high school."

"I wish you could get Shannon to stay and farm instead of going to college," Maggie said. "He'll play more football and get hurt."

"I'm not going to try to lead his life for him," said Phil. "I told him I was ready to retire, and he could rent the home place if he wanted to. He said he would for two crops, to get enough money for college."

"I wish Shannon would talk to me about it too," Maggie said. Her apron was bulging, and she came around the tree.

"His mind is made up, and if he doesn't like to farm you can't blame him for that," Phil said. He held the basket up for her so that the fruit would not bruise rolling in.

Maggie watched the muscles work as he set it down nearly filled. She put her hand on his forearm as he reached for another peach. "That's all I'll have time to peel and can after supper." She still held Phil's arm, and her fingers moved about through the matted black hair above his wrist. She took a very long breath. "We won't be left all alone for a long while yet. We're going to have another baby, too!"

Phil stared at her, his mouth for the moment half open under his mustache. "We—you are—again!"

She nodded. "I had Dr. MacGregor examine me at Clarence's."

"But he told you long ago what to do."

"I thought I was too old to have more with my change of life starting. Don't you want another one, Phillip?"

Phil continued only to stare. "Jesus!" he muttered.

Maggie felt the corners of her mouth begin to twitch. Almost in a whisper she repeated herself. "Don't you want it? Not at all."

"Another kid is all right. It's your age. You could have a hard time."

Maggie saw then that he was looking at the tightly drawn hair above her temples where the gray showed, streaks he had teased her about ever since the first had appeared. "Oh—me! Don't worry about me," she said. "I feel real good. Maybe this one will be a girl."

Chapter 32

It was a March night with a raw wind blowing through the grove and rattling shutters when Dr. MacGregor came again to the Garwood homestead for the birth of Phillip Garwood Junior.

Phil had worried over Maggie's pregnancy. He and Shannon had babied and restrained her from heavy work in a way she had never before known. Electra also came home to stay nightly as Maggie's time approached. She put water on the stove to heat while Phil telephoned the doctor. The labor pains had begun without warning and heightened rapidly, to Phil's further alarm; and he stayed at Maggie's bedside, bathing her forehead and wiping off perspiration until MacGregor arrived. He threw off his overcoat and got his sleeves rolled and hands washed barely in time to make the delivery. The baby was born easily with none of the complications Phil remembered and feared from the last time; and upstairs in heavy sleep of tired, healthy boys, Shannon and Bob did not awaken until breakfast. Still in stocking feet they ran into the bedroom to see the new baby. Bob was a strapping, overgrown boy, already tall as Shannon as they stood side by side; and as they bent together Maggie saw with a pang the first sparse beginnings of dark beard on his chin. She opened the bundle on her arm. "It's a brother."

The baby was squirming with greenish eyes wide open. He was skinny and had a thatch of thin, coarse hair. Bob looked briefly and stepped back. "We'll never have any more sister," he said.

Shannon did not straighten up for a moment. Fun of teasing sparkled into his blue eyes as his mother cuddled the baby. "Maybe it's all for the best." He shook his head. "A girl with a face like that!"

Maggie promptly struck at him but he dodged from reach. "He's all right!" she said hotly. "You hush up about him and run out to your chores. He'll be my baby when the rest of you have grown and gone."

For all his teasing Shannon of the men folks took the little newcomer straightest to heart. Three weeks after birth, Maggie caught Shannon at the scarred cradle holding a striped candy stick for the baby to suck. She snatched it away. "You'll give him colic," she cried.

"Aw, Mom, give it back to him. Look at him working his lips!"

Maggie kept the candy and carried it away with her, but she knew later in the day from stickiness of the baby's chin that Shannon had done it again. She found his candy supply and hid it, but on next trip to town Shannon bought more and hid that himself. Maggie protested the illicit feeding daily for a week and gave up when little Phillip's health seemed not affected.

When the child was three months old Maggie turned cold with terror one morning while cooking breakfast at an outbreak of gasps and gurgles from the bedroom. She flew to rescue the baby from choking, to find Shannon tossing him to the ceiling and catching him.

"Stop it! Stop it!" she screamed.

Shannon paused with the baby held horizontal high aloft and shook him. "I ain't hurting him. He was awake and kicking up his heels when I peeked in." The baby's head wobbled forward and back as Shannon dropped him a couple of feet.

Maggie gasped and snatched the infant into her own arms. "You'll break his neck! He's too little for that yet."

"Naw he isn't. He was having a good time."

Maggie restored the baby to his cradle. "I want you to leave him alone," she ordered. "You haven't got no sense with him." Little Phillip let go a squall of rage at his abandonment. She rocked him, but he went on yelling. "Now you've got him spoiled!"

Shannon laughed in delight at the problem he had created. "You just don't know how to handle him." He swooped his arms down and before Maggie could interfere caught the baby by the heels and upended him. The yells promptly changed into gurgles. "See! All he wants is some morning exercising and fresh air. I'll make a man of him." He hoisted Phillip straddle of his neck and galloped out of the house.

Maggie appealed to Phil when he came in. "You've got to make Shannon stop being so rough with the baby. He won't listen to me."

Phil shrugged. "I've never heard the kid yell like he was hurt. You're making more fuss over him than you did all the others."

It was well that Shannon continued to give the baby masculine attention, for Bob took no interest in a brother of that age; and Phil also remained rather neutral toward his new offspring. He held true to determination to withdraw from field work once Shannon rented the land. He

cared for the chickens, helped with milking, and occasionally puttered about fence fixing. He spent evenings with Andy planning Democrat campaign strategy but decided against a party invitation to make a speaking tour.

"Come to our state convention anyway," Andy coaxed. "Bryan is sending Robert Lansing to speak. We'll be choosing delegates to the National Convention, and I'll nominate you for one."

Phil refused the temptation. "I'll stay and you can tell me what happens."

At home Phil had intended for Maggie to rest as he did, but she had worked harder than ever as soon as she was strong after childbirth. "You don't have to slave," he tried to tell her. "We've got property enough. I'll hire a girl to come Mondays to bake and wash."

"No sir!" she told him flatly. "I will not have a stranger in here upsetting my house! I like to work."

It irritated Phil to have her reject his offer, but not enough to stir him to coercion. "All right, all right. If you want to die young, go on ahead. Anything to keep peace in the family."

"It don't do a damn lick of good to help her," he explained one day to Bruno Haeckel, when the Dutchman stopped to exchange greetings on his way home from town. He had found Phil in the shade with a newspaper and Maggie toiling in the garden. "I could go out there and do that hoeing, but she would only fly off to something else, and then we wouldn't either one rest!"

"Yah, these Frauen! Never they sit," Haeckel said.

Phil brought out beer hung in the well to cool, and the two men talked politics—of Andy's trip to Baltimore as head of the Kansas delegation to the National Convention, and of the nomination by Democrats of a dark horse.

"My hopes all for Bryan were," said Bruno.

Phil nodded. "I was disappointed, too, but Bryan saw the handwriting clearly. He told Andy that three strikes were out in politics same as baseball. Andy held our delegation for him until Bryan decided himself to support Wilson. Andy says he's a good man, and that Bryan will be on top in the Cabinet."

"It gifs good that we have not lost him," Haeckel agreed.

The early weeks of Phil's first leisurely spring and summer required self-discipline, and were almost as wearying as the habits of daily labor he sought to break down; but he had made up his mind to rest, and rest he would whether it gave him relief or not. After a time a growing measure

of contentment entered into it. Just as he had found fault with legislation during the Roosevelt-Taft era, after Wilson's victory Phil was jubilantly ready to endorse statutes. The political swing had been so decisive in Kansas from Andy's Democrat Clubs that the state elected the first Democrat governor in its history!

Phil had always read his newspapers through the last items and now subscribed for more. The rural mail carrier passed the Garwood home during the noon hour, and Phil always went to the roadbox for the mail. He would walk back slowly, pausing to make mental comments on items below headlines—all to the exasperation of Bob and Shannon, who waited respectively for a peek at the comic strips and sports scores. The boys saw nothing of interest in the activities of triumphant Democrats or in the protests from remaining Republican lame ducks.

One day in early summer in the midst of the shifts in office holders of a change of administrations, Phil opened the mailbox and saw inside the folded newspapers a long, white envelope. Instead of stamp it bore the Government's franking mark of official business. The boys, watching from the dining room window, saw him break the seal as he turned toward them, dawdle through a step with eyes on contents, then stop and stand very still. A moment later he jammed the bulk of newspapers under his arm and started striding toward the house. He came into the room to the family lingering over coffee and went to the head of the table; he stood with shoulders back, the letter held before him in both hands. "Listen to this, all of you!"

Mr. John P. Garwood

Rfd. 1

Plainsboro, Kansas

My dear Mr. Garwood:

If convenient for you to report to the Department of State within the month, you will find a position reserved for you.

Since our conversation in Topeka some years past, I have looked forward to opportunity for renewing our acquaintance. Your Government is always in need of able and faithful servants.

Most cordially yours,

William Jennings Bryan
Secretary of State.

In the blank of silence which followed the reading, Phil looked down the length of the long table they still used. Bob and Shannon sat with

heads up along one side, mouths open, and at the far end in a chair pushed back Maggie held her cup stopped halfway to her lips. Phil flourished the letter. "There's a leader for you!" he cried. "After twenty years he remembers who held faith in him. I've always said he should have been President!"

Maggie set down her cup. She moistened her lips. "Do you—want the job?"

"Of course I want it. It's what I've always wanted."

"What will you be doing, Dad?" Shannon asked.

"Whatever he wants me to. He'll tell me when I get there."

"How soon'll you go?"

"Well, there'll have to be arrangements about the farm and livestock. A man can't just jump two thousand miles." Phil sat down slowly, his eyes returning to the letter. "It says this month." He sucked his mustache. "I'll have to wire for more time."

"Will we have to sell out again—everything?" Maggie asked.

"I haven't thought that far yet." Phil raised his eyes to her as he became conscious of her voice sounding thin and strange. Her hands were twisting in her apron folds, and he saw in her face the same expression of naked fear he had seen when he had announced his candidacy for county commissioner, fear that had never left her until they returned home from Topeka. Before he knew it, he had smiled reassuringly. "Of course not," he said. "It's a political job, may not last over four years or eight if the Party is re-elected. We'll always keep our land."

Maggie's face cleared a little. "Shannon can get his wheat out; that's almost ripe. But how will he feed threshers, and what of his field of corn? He's kept it so clean and it's almost knee high."

Phil looked at Shannon and saw consternation the boy tried not to show. "This does upset things for you. You were counting on this crop and next year's to get you through college."

"Don't you stop for me, Dad. I can batch here and if I don't like that I can sell the crop in the field and get a job."

"That isn't the point," Phil said. "You would be out money either way; besides it's not what I told you you could count on."

"You didn't know this would come up," Shannon said.

"Neither did you. I—" Phil stopped. The family waited for him to go on. He reached forward and twiddled with his cup, fingers turning it back and forth on the saucer, forearm resting on the edge of the table while he stared at the checkered cloth. At last he swallowed the remains of his lukewarm coffee. "Whatever I decide, I'll see that you don't lose money on your crop," he told Shannon. "You can be sure of that." Then he got up and left the table.

Shannon had hitched his team and gone back to the cornfield and Phil was still sitting in the porch rocker smoking when Andy York drove into the yard. He stopped and swung his leg over the driver's side of his Ford roadster before Phil could get halfway to the car. Andy waved a letter. "It's from Bryan," he shouted.

Phil glanced through the letter and handed it back. "I got one like it," he said.

"To Washington?"

"Yes."

"I was hoping you would!" Andy was rubbing his hands. "I told Bryan about you. This'll be like the old days of working together for the Populists. Let's go at the same time." He halted, stared at Phil, who stood motionless. "Doesn't anything get you excited? Man, this is great!"

"I don't know whether I can go," Phil said.

"Of course you can."

"Well then, whether I should go." Phil sat down on the running board. Without looking up he knew Andy was still staring at him.

"Don't you want to go?" Andy asked.

"Yes, I want to. When I first read my letter, I got as excited as you did." Phil broke a piece of dried mud from the rim of the fender, crumpled it, and sifted a thin stream of dust between his knees to the spot of earth he gazed at. He smiled an unhappy half smile, raised his head and looked about the farm. "The trouble is I've been here a long time, and now I want this also." He motioned toward the implement shed and sounds of hammering from Bob tinkering with the binder, readying it for Shannon's harvest. "That kid has a better knack with machinery already than most grown men, and may be counting on starting farming himself one of these days. I've got a family, Andy, even a grandchild."

"We're starting one too—" Andy halted, grinned and colored at his unintended announcement. "Coming near Christmas, a boy we hope."

Phil laughed a little. "It's about time. But one that size you can take with you anywhere. I'm not worried about our baby, but Maggie and I would have to leave our others here. I may do it. I'm still trying to make up my mind."

"I was counting on you," Andy said. "If Bryan hadn't written you, I was going to ask him to as soon as I got to Washington."

"Thanks."

Andy waited a moment. "I'm on my way to town to wire acceptance. If you'll only say the word, I can send it for both of us."

"Not yet," Phil said. "I'll have to sleep on it." He got up from the running board, and Andy went around front to crank the engine. Phil

remained close by as Andy clambered under the wheel and pulled down the spark lever. The two men looked into each other's eyes a long moment.

"It is national politics, the top—what we've always dreamed of," Andy said.

Phil smiled faintly. "And I wish this had happened when I was thirty years younger." He stood and watched after the car until it disappeared down the road.

Phil went to bed late that night. Even so he hitched and twisted and turned beside Maggie. Soon she heard the clock strike two, then three; and still she remained motionless and breathed deeply pretending sleep until he sat up and fumbled in the dark for his shoes. She raised her head.

"Aren't you feeling well, Father?"

"Yes, I'm well, but there is no use keeping you awake if I can't sleep. I'm going to lie on the cot."

He went out on tiptoes so as not to awaken the baby.

Maggie listened to the faint click of pointers on trailing laces of his untied shoes dragging the linoleum across the dining room. She lay back and let tears and sobs come together, pouring both without sound into the pillow. He'll go, she thought. He did and he will again. Washington! All her tortures of past attempts to enter social life in Topeka returned, multiplied to scope of the national capitol. We'll never come back home all of us together again. It's too far, and there won't be any new baby this time nor any new election soon enough. Not for four long years, and I can't stand it that long. If I go there, I'll die there.

After a while she dried her eyes on the sleeve of her night gown, turned on her back and stared at the dim ceiling. It was not fair of Phil to go back on his promise to Shannon. It wasn't fair to take her away from the children. "He didn't even ask me," she whispered, "and he's sitting out there glorying in thought of going all for himself." For the first time in her life resentment of anger stirred in her against Phil. "I won't go!" Maggie caught her breath at the fierceness with which she had hissed the three words almost aloud. Immediately many reasons for staying rushed to mind—the loss they would take on a rush sale of machinery and livestock, the hard and hot train trip for the baby, lack of information whatever on his job with Bryan. "You'll just be rushing into this thing blind," she said to herself. "I'll tell him that." She began sorting out and memorizing all the arguments she would use, and with each her determination grew. "I'll tell him these things, every one of them the first thing in the morning," she vowed. "And after that if he still says he is going, I'll just say: You'll leave without me."

Dawn was breaking when Maggie got up to cook breakfast. She left the bedroom pale and defiant, ready to get the question settled at once, but Phil had gone from the house. The living room air was strong with pipe smoke. He had fixed himself a bite in the kitchen, for the coffee pot was still warm on the stove, and there were crumbs of toast beside his cup and saucer on the oilcloth covered table. The sun was yet a little under the horizon when Maggie went upstairs to shake Shannon and Bob awake. As she passed the hall window to descend again, she saw Phil on the pasture slope beyond the barn. He was walking slowly, hands locked behind him. The cattle were lying down on the green flat of the ravine below, and he stopped to look at them. Maggie thought he was going out to drive them in for milking until he turned and moved on in a different direction. She noticed with a pang that his shoulders were not at all squared as they had always been at lyceum debates and on speech platforms, or as he had pulled them back for an interval in reading Bryan's letter at the table. His head was bent before him with his gaze on the ground, and he lifted and set down his feet as if plodding. Maggie recognized then that it was a painful decision for him also whether to go or stay, and he had been struggling with it all night long. He was getting old, and he was tired. He had said so himself, and now he had been robbed of the rest he was just starting to find with his family. What was it driving him and had always driven him? In that moment Maggie saw clearly that not she only but Phil, too, had always been terribly apart and alone in all their crises; and she felt also the stabbing truth that she might have tried more to understand him.

Maggie watched until the grove hid Phil from view. She put her face down into her arms where they rested along the window sash. "My darling, my darling," she whispered. "I'll go with you."

All morning Phil wandered about the farm and in and out of the house silent, moody and depressed. Shortly before noon he sat down with ink bottle at the kitchen table and wrote his answer to Bryan in time to send it off with the mailman. Silent also, Maggie watched him put away the pen. He did not tell her what he had written until all assembled at the dining room table again. Then he cleared his throat and announced: "I'm not going to Washington."

"I hope you're not giving it up for me," Shannon said. "I wouldn't want to think I had done that to you."

"No, I'm not doing it for you," Phil told him. "If I'm giving up anything for anybody, it's for all of us including myself. Fifty-five is too old to start in new."

Chapter 33

The day Shannon's wheat was ripe, Bob announced at breakfast he was going to drive the binder. "Shan says he'll pay me man's wages if I can run it, and I know I can!"

"No," Maggie objected. "You're too young to work around a sharp sickle and all those rollers and cog wheels."

"Aw, Mom, you worry over us about everything," Bob said. "I know enough not to get myself caught. I did all the repairing, didn't I?"

"Yes, but the binder wasn't running." Maggie turned to Phil. "It's too dangerous, isn't it, Dad? He'd better let Shannon do it."

Phil went on stirring sugar into his coffee. "Bob thinks he's big enough to do a man's work this year, and riding will be easier on him than shocking. It will be all right if he's careful."

"I want to build the shocks myself to make sure they're solid," Shannon said. "I've got Mike Kelly to take my grain in on his threshing run." He looked at his father for objections. "I'm going to thresh right out of the field instead of stacking. It'll save money."

"Clarence put that notion in your head," Phil said. "It's your wheat, but if rains set in and the bundles sprout, you'll both wish you'd stacked like I always did."

Maggie spoke up quickly. "On the other hand lightning might strike the stacks."

Phil flushed a little at her defense of Shannon and avoided looking at either of them. "It's his grain," he repeated, "and like I told Clarence, he can do as he damn pleases with it."

The rains Phil warned against did not come that year. The boys finished binding and shocking in record time. During the interval between wheat cutting and start of threshing, Shannon walked from sunrise till dark behind team and cultivator in his cornfield. He carried a corn knife strapped to a handle of his implement and cut any last sunflowers growing directly in corn rows. After every weed was killed he went over the field still again with shovels set shallow to stir a surface dust mulch and conserve soil moisture against the beginning drouth.

When Bob came home on Saturday and found Shannon planning to work through Sunday, he began to scoff. "You'd better get a job like me and be sure of a little in wages. Unless it rains pretty soon your corn will die anyhow." Bob was working for Mike Kelly, helping the machine owner overhaul his threshing rig.

"A few dollars aren't enough," Shannon said. "For college I've got to gamble on a crop."

"A few dollars are better than nothing, and I ain't never going to college and work in some old office afterwards."

"You'll never make a farmer either," Shannon told him.

Bob grinned. "Nope. Too much hoping and trusting to luck. You can't put a wrench on the weather to make it rain."

Phil smiled faintly at the conversation. Under urging, Bob had reluctantly agreed to enter high school that fall, and at every opportunity announced he would never go to college. Phil had given up Maggie's hope that Bob might someday farm the home place, and also his own that he would follow after Shannon. The only books Bob ever read were on engineering. He had already become known among neighbors as handy with machinery. They called him reckless, but utilized his skill. "Get the Garwood kid," they said when the family car turned contrary or the connecting rods began to knock. If a windmill head went bad, he was certain of that repair job. He climbed towers without regard to height and, perched upon the vane arm, changed pinions and adjusted gearing in mid-air.

Maggie too had been listening to the boys. "You'll get yourself caught in a machine one of these days and maybe lose a hand or arm," she warned Bob. Then she turned to Shannon. "But you are working too hard as hot as the sun is."

Phil gave no advice on either risk. He left the discussion and went to his room to answer Andy's letter from Washington. "I've been promoted again," Andy had written. "I'm one of Bryan's secretaries now and sit in on Cabinet meetings. I've a feeling I'm being educated for political assignment when next election time rolls around. Bryan is still campaign manager actually."

Shannon's corn was starting to shoot before he finished his last cultivation, and he tied burlap muzzles over the noses of the horses to prevent them from snapping off tassels. The height of stocks and foliage shut circulation of air from his lower body, and the sun baked his shirt that stuck sweat dark to his back and shoulders. The corn leaves scratched and chapped his hands, face and neck. He walked in the cloud of dust he raised. It got inside his overalls, and sweat running down his legs carried it into his shoes until mud squished between his toes. At night, Shannon could hardly take time to unharness and feed his team before rushing to the stock tank to strip and bathe his itching, galled skin. He kept a bar of soap under a tin can on a flat-topped fencepost beside the tank, and while he lathered himself from the greenish, moss-smelling water he thought of hot and cold showers pouring over him in the high school

gymnasium. But instead of wooden grandstands there were college stadiums with pennants waving, charging line plunges, and roaring crowds. Once washed clean of grime, his chunky body stood out muscled yet milk smooth save for the brick red of burned and freckled hands and face.

Freshened and with supper eaten he got out advanced chemistry texts his high school teacher had lent him and tried to concentrate. It was easier after Phil told him to use his writing desk in the sitting room where it was quietest, especially when Phil read through the evening nearby. Yet sometimes as Shannon sat with book propped open, squinting dust inflamed eyes in the poor light of kerosene table lamp, his head would droop. Replacing the print he saw shelves of bottled chemicals in the little smelly high school laboratory, and felt again the mystery of bubbling, smoking test tubes. Also on college weekends there would be parties and dances. There would be prettier girls who did not want merely to settle on a farm to endless field work and chores, and in college he would be both student and football star. A couple of crops is all I need to get away from here, he thought, just a couple crops to the turning point in my life.

At first Shannon got results from the long, extra days he had spent working his corn. He got to see it grow taller and stay green longer than any other field in the community. But as days of cloudless, brassy skies followed one upon another, the tassels burned white and turned down; the leaves crackled in the hot wind and broke from their stalks. Such weather was ideal for threshing wheat, however, and Kelly's rig finished its run a week ahead of schedule.

Shannon binned most of the bushels of his rent share for seed. "Wheat is the only good crop," he declared. "I'm going to plant all my ground to it."

"It was the only crop of profit *this* year," Phil said.

Shannon went back to his cornfield and rode the clomping stalk-cutter to chop the coarse, dead plants that weeks earlier he had tried desperately to keep alive. He disked the field twice and then started plowing wheat stubble. There the soil had not been stirred all summer and was sun-baked almost brick hard. The plowshare had to be sharpened daily. Its point dug through the crust and jumped out again from time to time, turning up great, jagged cakes of earth. The sulky plow bounced and jolted the seat, bruising and blistering his buttocks. It took twice the normal time to harrow the clods smooth, but he stuck stubbornly at his job until the wheat was planted. Finished he waited for rain and went with Chet Freeman to the river hand fishing for carp and catfish.

"They've passed a law against catching them by hand," Maggie scolded. "That Chester Freeman will get you into trouble someday. It's against the law to sell fish, too, but he does it."

"Mom, your middle name is worry." Proudly Shannon showed her his hands, scratched from wrists down by rough mouths of catfish. "It's loads of fun to noodle 'em out when the river is low. If we see a warden coming we'll outrun him!"

Shannon remained cheerful until all the deep holes to be found in the river had no more fish. After that he moped about the farm. He played with little Phillip much as ever, but talked less and less during meals and avoided mention of crop prospects. On days when the wind blew hard, sweeping up clouds of dust and uncovering to hungry birds the seed wheat he had drilled into his fields, Maggie noted that his appetite was poor though she cooked ham and baked beans or roast beef hash for him. She heard him when he left his bed of nights to stand outside watching thin cloud banks which rose now and then from the northwest but always dissipated after a little lightning and a few scattered raindrops.

"It's a crying shame," she told Phil. "He worked so hard and counted so much on a crop. And there is Clarence trying to get started too."

"You and I went through years worse than this when we were young," he answered. "We had harder times in the nineties than they'll probably ever have. They've got to learn to take bitter with sweet."

Maggie winced and did not go on to ask him to give the boys help as she had intended. Instead she voiced another phase of her concern for Shannon. "I wish he would find a nice, quiet girl he liked. He hardly ever takes one anywhere and never the same one twice. He's too backward around them, just like Chet."

Phil frowned. "Shannon is not backward. He'll know when he finds the right one and be better off if it's after his education."

By the end of September it was clear that Shannon's wheat crop for the next year was lost, and one evening Maggie sat down beside him where he had been sitting for an hour on the porch steps, moodily as Phil so often had. "Don't worry, Shan. It will rain again someday. It always has. You just have to try again next year." She placed her hand warm on his forearm and stroked through the curly red hair.

Shannon sat very still submitting to her caress. She saw his struggle to keep bitter discouragement from showing in his blue eyes. "Sure it will, Mom." He swallowed and managed a grin. "Why, I'm lucky. If there had been corn, I'd have had to shuck it. Now I can camp all fall on the river with Chet and hunt ducks!"

That time Maggie refrained from saying anything derogatory about

Chester Freeman. She squeezed Shannon's arm and smiled back. "You boys will have a good time."

"Sure, sure," Shannon said.

Maggie sat for a moment silent, helplessly sensing how uncomfortable her concern made him feel. When she got up she went into the sitting room where Phil sat at his desk with sheets of Andy's last letter before him as he wrote his answer. A stir of jealous resentment of his preoccupation rose in Maggie and overcame uncertainty of how to approach him. She closed the door and crossed the room. Phil still had not looked up when she stood beside his chair.

"We've got money in the bank that could send Shannon to school!" she burst out. "Why don't we use it?"

Phil's head snapped up and his eyebrows arched high as he stared at her. After a moment he said, "Has he been asking you for help?"

"Of course not, and if you knew your own children better you wouldn't ask!"

"Do you know how much it would cost to send a boy through four years of college? I'd have to pay Clarence and Electra the equivalent and send Bob or pay him too, and the baby will be growing up."

"I don't care. You're the one who encouraged him to want to go, and now this summer all you can think about is Andy and his politics. You don't even see how disappointed Shannon is!"

Phil flushed, body stiffening forward in authority. "We had too many children!" He saw her gaze fight to meet his, falter and drop.

Phil relaxed back into his chair. For a little while he pinched at his mustache. Then he got up and brought a chair close to his. "Sit down, Mom." He went to the doorway and called Shannon in. "I have something to tell you," he said to the inquiry in Shannon's face. "I've talked to your high school principal and your coach, and you are going to get an athletic scholarship from the State Agricultural College for next fall." Phil saw a look of incredible joy, and then the boy's young body reacted with a leap high into the air and a great yell.

"You see, Mom, my football is going to put me through college! Touchdown Red, that's what they'll call me!"

Phil smiled faintly to Maggie. "You've never wanted him to play; it's the reason I hadn't told you. But he would have anyway whenever he got there, and it was the only kind of scholarship I could get him."

"*You* got it?" asked Shannon. From both voice and face his pride and elation had been snuffed.

"That's right. There are still people at the college who remember me from the Populist days." Phil winced inwardly before a hurt look of dis-

esteem which Shannon made no attempt to hide. "At first I hadn't intended to tell you, but I'd rather you got it from me than maybe from other sources later on."

"I don't like pull."

"Neither do I." Phil spoke quickly, before Shannon could declare himself into a stand on the issue. "I did not use it only because you were my son. Most boys who get those scholarships are no good for anything except football, but you are. It's important that you go to college." Phil meant himself to be clear and convincing, but unintended, betraying warmth slipped into his voice. "I never got to finish, and you are the only one in my family to want an education as I did." He halted and awaited Shannon's judgment. Stocky and slender, blue-eyed and black, yet father and son they read each other in silence. Phil heard Maggie's quickened breathing catch. The fear struck him that she would begin to plead, spoiling this moment, and hurriedly he moistened his lips. "I could not have done it for most others," he said. "If you take this scholarship, I expect you to make good." And then abruptly, tenderly and man to man both Phil and Shannon were smiling.

"I won't let you down, Dad."

Chapter 34

Andy and Vivian made a visit home at Christmas time, and Phil spent New Year's Eve with them at Jim York's.

The first thing upon his arrival, Andy thrust out his hand. Phil looked quickly and with some uncertainty into his cousin's face at the peculiar grip he received, then returned tentatively a certain pressure. It was at once answered and they both smiled.

"You see I really have been East," Andy said.

"In more ways than one," Phil answered. "Congratulations." He turned to greet Jim and Mary, and saw their perplexity.

"That was lodge double talk," Vivian explained. "Andy has joined the Masons."

"I've been wondering for years why he didn't," Phil said.

"Until I did join I wondered why you never asked me to," Andy told him. "I knew you went to meetings at West Bend."

Mary York took Phil's overcoat, and Vivian and Andy hustled him to the cradle to see their baby. "We named her Norma Lee."

Phil chuckled the curly-haired infant under the chin until she smiled. "The trouble is you can't get a girl elected President."

"I don't know why," Vivian said. "Andy will have the constitution amended."

Andy laughed. "Things are changing almost that fast under the Democrats."

"That's what I want to hear about."

Vivian took the baby into the bedroom to change and nurse her. The two men turned to look for chairs. Into a wall of the living room of his new house Jim had built an old-fashioned, wide fireplace lighted on occasions. Logs were burning in it, and for the mantel Vivian had added the modern touch of two tall, red candles for the New Year's hour of arrival. Within warm reach of the blaze under a crayon portrait of Dean, Grandmother York with shawl across her back sat in her rocker knitting. Phil walked over, laid his hand on her shoulder and squeezed. "How are you, Aunt Emma?" She smiled up through wrinkles with eyes still gentle and clear, but she had become nearly deaf and he saw she had not caught his words. He watched the clicking needles, bent and spoke loudly. "You still do that faster than young girls."

She heard and her face warmed. Pausing with yarn encircling her finger tips she held up the small, bright sweater. "It's for Norma Lee. I have to get it done before Andy goes back."

Mary York brought to the center table a bowl rounded with popcorn balls, then went to sit with her sewing beside her mother-in-law. Jim poured tumblers full to their rims with hot cider and set the jug again close against the fireplace heat. "Pull up a chair with Andy and me," he said, "and see if you can believe all he says the government is going to do for the people."

Phil grinned back his own doubts. "He wrote me of them."

"Man, you've only heard the beginning," Andy said.

Phil sat down between the two and took a slow swallow from his glass. The cider, fragrant with steam and aged hard, warmed him all the way into his stomach. He stretched his feet to the blazing logs, cheerfully ready to challenge Andy. "Any one point sounded like a big order," he said. "If you try to develop Norfolk harbor to give the South a share of New York's shipping monopoly, you're in for a hell-of-a political fight. New England sends a lot of Republicans to Congress."

Andy laughed gleefully. "Bryan is way ahead of you. He's pulled Chicago and Detroit over with a St. Lawrence seaways project and split Northern opposition. Under Wilson it isn't South against North anymore, but public good of our whole nation."

Good of the public. Phil recalled at once the bitter fight of Populists to lower freight rates. "What about the railroad companies? They're not going to see their Chicago freight shipped by water."

"Foreseen! We've conferred with main line executives on tonnage increase from development of the Lakes' region. Superior's iron ore will build a new industrial area.

"I tell you, when you see the whole program the parts fit. It's a beautiful thing!" Leaning toward Phil and Jim, his elbows on his thighs and fingers interlocked between his knees, Andy began to detail other plans. Rural electricity, flood control and irrigation—a whole new government economic policy to hire unemployed people to build and build.

Andy's words gushed. His eager face with blue eyes shining turned from one to the other listener. He spoke as Phil had heard Bryan plead to the Populists, with passion for recognition of his program and its merits; and as Phil listened he caught glimpses as of a miniature nation being spread before him, criss-crossed by highways and power lines and its people busy and prosperous. A thrill almost forgotten returned to him and for a moment he lost touch with Andy's words from a heady excitement that was like a rushing of blood in the brain. Then there came back to Phil renewed awareness of self, and as he pinched at his mustache one part of him clung to the joyful feeling, trying to embrace it, and another part, stubbornly contrary, began asking questions. The beautiful picture nation dissolved, and he was left coldly wondering whether it were age or envy of his cousin that made his enthusiasm so easily lost. He came back to Andy in the middle of a sentence. ". . . drop tariffs and increase imports for more and cheaper goods for all of us."

"They'll be cheaper all right if you let stuff from Europe and Japan in," Jim said. "And it will cut the price of wheat."

"You'll get your binders and other machinery for less."

Phil waited, looking from one to the other.

Jim rubbed at the creases of question on his forehead. "It sounds all right if all costs drop. But if the things I buy don't come down I'll be loser. I'd rather have a good price for grain till I see."

"Somebody's prices have to drop first," Andy said. His voice rose a little. "Are you two turning Republican!"

Phil saw Emma York slow her knitting to glance at Dean's picture and then to watch them with the same quiet approval on her face seen always when discussions had grown hot in the living presence of his Uncle. He winked at her and turned back to Andy. "Jim's right. You're inviting dislocation. Cheap foreign goods could throw our factory workers out of jobs, at least temporarily."

"Yes," said Jim, "and just when we're having a drouth to keep us farmers from buying new machinery. We need more money for what little we do raise to take up slack times like this—not less."

Phil nodded. He knew that in Washington they must be worried about

the current economic outlook. "Farm income is a way out of line and getting worse. I'd go slow about putting too many things out of kilter right now. Business runs in cycles. You remember the Panic of 1873, then 1893. This is the end of 1913."

Andy looked keenly at Phil. "I didn't write that to you."

Phil set down his emptied cider glass and took out his pipe. "No, but I've been watching the stock market."

Andy paused before ruefully nodding. "You've got me there. There is almost a panic already in the East, but I'm not supposed to tell it and scare folks." He paused again and longer as Vivian entered the room, came over and sat down on an arm of his chair. He turned to Jim. "It's the reason your farm prices are down in spite of poor yields, and also why the administration is hurrying into a big program. They have to head off a crash. A Panic nowadays could kill a party."

Vivian put her hand on Andy's arm. "We wouldn't mind seeing that happen to the Republicans!"

They all laughed.

"It is happening to them," Andy said. "The Wilson-Bryan team is winning over their best progressives, men like LaFollette and Nebraska's young George Norris. They don't call themselves Democrats, but they vote with us. Senator Norris has always said the key to better rural living was electricity and that it could be produced cheaply enough for country folks. He'll get his chance to prove it at Muscle Shoals. You'd like to have electric lights. All farmers would."

"It would be worth a lot," Phil agreed. He felt Andy's relentless optimism stir him again, and saw the understanding admiration in Vivian's eyes upon her husband's face. If Maggie had taken interest in such things.

Phil was sitting beside the wide front window and looked away musingly through the pane at the distant sky glow above Plainsboro. In an hour or so there would be horns blowing and confetti flying in the courthouse square, a scene brighter under the new white bulbs than New York street celebrations had ever been beneath the old gas lamps. There had truly been much improvement. "Yes, electricity will light our farms," he said. "Someday people will cook and cool with it and even heat houses—but I'm afraid it's still a long time off."

Andy rubbed his palms anew and broke again into happy narration. It was coming sooner than Phil thought; a big Government power dam on the Tennessee River would prove that electricity could be cheap. Senator Norris called it his yardstick. It was only the beginning of a dam and levee system to lock that river against floods and wire every home in the

valley. "When the whole nation sees what can be done on one stream public pressure will make utility corporations follow suit on others. A project like that can pay for itself in twenty years."

"Moneyed men want profits quicker than that," Phil said. "I don't think they'll take it up."

"Bryan and Norris don't either, but Wilson wants to give private industry first chance. If it can't or won't develop the country and keep people in jobs, then the Government will step in."

"Hold up a minute." Phil had seen the legal issue of government competition with private enterprise. "Don't you remember all the trickery we used to beat the telephone company's franchise on our one line into town. You'll be fighting injunctions from now till doomsday."

"And even if you win in the courts, where's the money coming from?" Jim demanded. "Taxes are too damned high now with hard times coming on."

"Spending will stop hard times," Andy said. "There can't be panics while people get wages. I've told you the projects will pay out in twenty years."

"Most government meddling I've seen never did pay out," Jim said. "This all sounds like damned Socialism. Where you going to get the millions to start with? You still haven't told us. No party can raise taxes that much and keep getting re-elected for twenty years."

Andy reminded him of the Sixteenth Amendment and income taxes. "Voters generally won't feel it on the rich, and the Government can sell bonds."

"You'll have to pay them off later," Jim said, "with interest."

"We'll do that when times are good and money easy to get. It's no different from selling stock in corporations."

Above Jim's eyes the wrinkles returned, drawn tighter than before. He took a couple of skeptical pulls on his pipe. "Corporations can go broke."

Phil's own frown deepened to real seriousness and he faced Andy. "I don't like that theory either, and I'm not saying so for sake of argument. A man has to live within his means, and the Government should."

"But this is your very own idea for county and state back in Populist days," Andy cried. "Borrow and build! You can't have forgotten your own campaign slogan."

"I haven't forgotten that it didn't work for the Populists."

"It was not fairly tried."

"It was tried, Andy, until the people got scared and put Republicans back in to pay off the Populist debt."

"But it wasn't tried on this scale with Federal Treasury backing. I never thought you would give up faith in things like that."

Phil grunted and kicked back an ember that popped out of the fireplace. He did not like being reminded that his enthusiasm of earlier years was gone. Neither could he alter his new belief that putting together this whole program of Wilson's would be a problem hopelessly complex. Besides his doubts he felt fear, rising from his own desperate experience with mortgaged indebtedness. Slowly he said, "I've watched too many men find it easy to go into debt but too hard to get out. If Wilson's administration makes itself popular spending more than it takes in, it may set precedent for national bankruptcy." He saw Andy wince and for a moment look less positive, and it spurred Phil to argue his case. "You will go bankrupt, too, if you don't get voted out first, because expenditures are kept increasing by more and more graft. I remember how it was on the State Board of Education, and you can too because you were on the appropriations committee. Building costs at the Agricultural College kept going up and up, while the amount of construction we got for our money went down and down."

Andy reached for his cider glass still one quarter full from Jim's last replenishment, but instead of drinking he turned it round and round on the table, his gaze upon it. At last he said, "I know, but, damn it, it doesn't *have* to work that way."

While Andy continued to stare uncertainly at his glass, Vivian spoke up. "One thing you are all forgetting. You established a fine college the state needed, and you built good country schoolhouses in place of those sod-walled rat nests I taught my first terms in."

"Could it have gone on?" Phil asked. "Can any government survive continually spending beyond its income?"

"I suppose not forever," she conceded.

Andy turned his gaze to the picture on the wall of his father. Out of the frame he looked down upon them all in sober, courageous reflection, and Andy returned to Phil with determination in his chin. "The one thing no government can do and survive is tolerate masses of hungry citizens in a land of plenty. Coxey's army could easily have grown into a revolution. We'll have to learn how to make this thing work.—What else would you do?"

"When you say *have to*," Phil told him, "you're reading desperation of necessity into the future. But there's so damned much about the future men can't foresee. Maybe I would try my old ideas again if conditions got serious enough—I might have to. But I couldn't feel sure they would work. Maybe there isn't anything that will work, and we can't have all

good times; and to have spells of them we have to have hard times too. Even if we kept a steady pace halfway in between, the country wouldn't progress faster in the long run." He turned to Jim. "You've said nothing for quite a while. What do you think?"

Jim shook his head. "I think I could never be a good politician—but I can get a new jug of cider."

"No," Andy said. "It's too near midnight. I have something special for the New Year."

While Andy went to get it, Jim stirred up the fireplace and added new logs. Phil stood beside Vivian at the mantel while she lighted the candles. He told her of Shannon's scholarship, speaking as though casually mentioning it, but she was not deceived.

"That is wonderful," she cried. "You must tell him so from his old teacher."

"I thought you would remember him since you had to switch him."

Vivian laughed. "The youngsters with mischief in them most often make something of themselves. You must be very proud of him."

"I'm proud of all my children," Phil said, "but he is the first to want the full education I did and never got."

"You have it," Vivian told him. "You just didn't get it by way of the classroom. You should have come with us to Washington."

"No. For Andy it was the right thing. He's in his medium again and this time he'll go far. He has the right wife to help him."

Vivian flushed. "Thank you."

Phil smiled at her. "Sometimes as I read his letters I thought I should have gone. Arguing here tonight reminded me more than ever of the life I once wanted, but I also know now how much a man's family can mean. Under other circumstances I might have had both, but it's too late."

Vivian put her hand momentarily warmly on his arm. "You have more of both than you think. A person doesn't have to be rushing around in the middle of things to enjoy interest in them."

Andy returned and removed from a wicker packing container a dark decanter with gilded neck. He took it to his mother and held its label toward her. "Remember this?" he asked close to her ear.

Emma gazed and a deep smile broke through her wrinkles. "It's the wine Grandpap sent from the old country for Daddy and me on our wedding! He kept sending it for our anniversaries as long as he lived."

"It is your anniversary again and mine and Vivian's," Andy told her.

Mary York brought out tall slender glasses, part of her family heirloom from Emma. She lined them along the fireplace mantel for Andy while he worked with the seal.

"Let's each think of something we can all drink to," Vivian said.

"I don't know anything better for next year or any year than good crops," Jim told her, and his wife now at his side nodded.

"And I'm going to wish the best in learning to young people in school everywhere. Once a teacher always a teacher," Vivian said.

Andy had begun thumbing the cork and with a pop it departed from the decanter. A wisp of vapor issued from its black throat. He tipped it to the glasses one by one, and the candle light scintillated through the thin streams of sparkling Burgundy. They each took up their drink and encircled Emma York's chair as Andy gave her the last. She knew what they wanted of her. She looked from the portrait of Old Dean to the ancient clock with its long, swinging pendulum, and raised her glass a little, steadied against trembling by both hands.

"To my children, grand children, and Daddy 'till I'm with him again." She blinked over the last words but with no tears in her eyes.

"That makes it crops, education, and family," Phil said.

"And I'll drink to Wilson's program," Andy announced. He spoke almost in challenge, and everyone looked with him to Phil.

Phil's gaze slowly made the circle of them. He was thinking of Bryan's words in Hotel Throop that defeats became past history while issues remained. Perhaps they would always remain to perpetuate the dream of a better living lot for the common man. He felt himself smiling and saw that smile kindle something in all. It was always good to hope. "I'll go along with Andy," he said. "To Wilson and 1914."

They bent together, touching glasses to Emma's in a tight cluster. Then they stepped back apart and waited for the hour to strike.

Chapter 35

To Andy in Washington, outbreak of war that year was at once a real and terrific event. To Shannon beginning college, Europe remained, like Mars, a symbol of eternal wars and an equally long way off. As a football rookie he was battered to aching exhaustion of afternoons in scrimmage with lettermen—and loved it. But there were also the light in Phil's eyes on the day of his departure and the advice twice repeated: "You won't be playing games all your life. Stick to your studies too." Shannon had promised and in remembrance fought his fatigue daily. Yet he nodded in spite of himself in classrooms and of evenings at his desk, and could not distinguish himself in his courses—which seemed a hundred times harder than they ever were in high school.

When the team won over University, an arch enemy since Populist days, the students declared a holiday in defiance of President Jordan's refusal to grant one. All night they had paraded streets with band and tin pans, singing and shouting. Shannon watched from his rooming house window every time they went past but dared not join in the delicious uproar because of Coach Moose Wylie's orders. "If there is disciplinary action, I don't want you declared ineligible."

When Shannon in blue and white freshman skullcap left for school next morning the campus was picketed by paddle-armed upper classmen. As he approached they were running a student through a double line for attempting to crash a gate. The last whack nearly launched the boy into the air, and an outstretched foot tripped him sprawling into the cinders. "That'll teach you manners!" He got up scratched and red-faced, almost tearful in helpless humiliation and limped off down the street.

Shannon had not expected physical prevention of class attendance. The bullying mob startled him and sent challenging warmth into his chest.

This was not Shannon's usual campus entrance, but he headed across the street for the blocked gateway. One of the two boys who stepped out on either side of the walk to meet him had done the tripping. "No work today," he announced. "We're all on vacation."

"I have to go over anyway," said Shannon.

"What for?"

Shannon twitched inside at the sharp, suspicious tone. The questioners drew together before him, fingering their paddles. His arm tightened instinctively about his books as on a football. He slowed and evened his steps, tensing muscles in back and legs.

"Sure you're not going to class?"

Shannon looked straight before him and kept moving. As soon as they raised their paddles, he would go in under spinning. A shoulder lunged up into the ribs of each would lay them out like tenpins.

At that moment someone called from the crowd. "Hey, he's on the freshman team. He can't get mixed up with us."

As if to a magic in the utterance the boys stepped respectfully aside, and the crowd parted to give passage. An exceptionally loud burst of voices came from behind as he went up the hill. "Was you at the drugstore when the showcase got busted? We took over the soda fountain, everything on the house. Old man Hopkins come runnin' out of the prescription department hollerin' 'pole-ece, pol-ee-ce.' And hell, there wasn't a damn 'pole-ece' in sight!"

When Shannon walked into the chemistry classroom, Dr. Schleicher eyed him from beneath heavy, Germanic brows without comment. In due

time a few others who had managed to sneak onto the campus made their appearance. Schleicher arose with the bell. He looked at them all, individually and collectively and was opening his lips to speak as Johnny Wakefield, freshman fullback, dashed in through the doorway, his round, Irish face pink with exuberance of conquest. "I had one hell of a time gettin' here, Perfessor, but I finally made it!"

Professor Schleicher threw back his head and laughed as heartily as the rest. He spread out his notes and looked again at his token of a class. "I want to thank those of you present for being here this morning if you really wanted to come. Otherwise, I would rather you had stayed away." He paused, listening to a band somewhere outside playing the school song with rapacious enthusiasm and smiled faintly without humor. He made the next assignment and began his lecture.

Minutes plodded by, and the students listened nervously as cheering approached their building and a rush of feet climbed the stairs with hallway voices shouting: "Everybody out!" The door was thrust violently inward.

Dr. Schleicher turned, coldly facing the intruders, his complexion growing just a little white. "Please do not interrupt the class."

In mute seconds immediately following, Shannon felt again the spread of mounting antagonism he had at the gate. These rowdies had better not lay a finger on his body. From behind Johnny Wakefield tapped his foot. "We can clear the room!" he whispered. Together they sat solid awaiting the outcome of Schleicher's stand.

Yelling students poured in through the doorway and began upsetting chairs. Schleicher relaxed and nodded to the class in dismissal. Shannon stood up. He saw disappointment of happy hope in Johnny's face. The invaders helped them both into their coats. "You guys are all right. We know. Coach's orders."

They were hustled downstairs with the fragments of various classes into the cool brightness of November sunlight—the captive students to new paddle lines, Shannon and Johnny to freedom. They stood and watched others run the gauntlets. "Jeepers, Red," said Wakefield. "If they treat us this special as freshies, think what it will be like to be lettermen! But we sure missed a good fight!" He slapped Shannon's shoulders and they laughed together.

With no classes the afternoon seemed to Shannon a chance to finish his biochemical experiment of the preceding week, but Coach Wylie saw it as opportunity for some extra football practice. As soon as he could finish his shower afterwards, Shannon hurried to Garwood Hall.

The student laboratory with its rows of long, black-topped tables scorched and acid stained was deserted. He took a set of slides from his wall locker to his station, laid out his manual open beside them and turned on the gooseneck lamp. Then he went down the hall to check out a microscope but the storeroom window was closed—the keeper having taken advantage of the student holiday to leave early. “Damn it, if I could have got here sooner I’d have caught him,” muttered Shannon. His irritation came less from the keeper’s neglectfulness than from repeated intrusions of the athletic department upon study time. It took away the gratification Johnny Wakefield had made him feel for student deference shown him as an athlete. It was too late to go back to his room and get any work in before supper.

Shannon returned to the laboratory, quiet as it had never been of class time, and sat at his table to read his history assignment. The air was warm and stuffy with ventilation closed off. His body felt lax and restful from hard exercise and a hot shower. He laid his face on his arms and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again it was night.

Shannon sat up with a start. He looked at his watch and it was eleven. The watchman had gone by locking halls hours ago! After his first consternation Shannon chuckled at himself for his predicament. Possibly someone was in the building. If not at worst it meant only a long night without supper. He opened the laboratory door and listened. The familiar stink of chemicals seemed strange, and there was not a sound. He started down the dim, empty hallway for the stairs to check the floor beneath. His footsteps echoed hollowly and unconsciously he softened them. On the landing he smelled tobacco smoke and saw a crevice of light beneath Dr. Schleicher’s office door.

Schleicher in rubber apron opened it to a knock and stood pipe in hand looking in questioning surprise at his visitor. On his table a beaker bubbled gently over a Bunsen’s burner before a rack of phials and test tubes.

Shannon blushed as he told of going to sleep. Schleicher smiled in amusement. “It is good to be young and healthily tired,” he said. “I will help you escape.” He paused in second thought. “Unless, now rested, you wish to complete your experiment.”

“I’m rested!” Shannon assured him. “But the store room is locked.”

“I can supply your needs.”

“Thank you, sir. It is Number 12, the microscopic analysis of photosynthesis.”

Shannon felt Professor Schleicher hesitate fleetingly. Then he unlocked a cabinet, but before removing the microscope inside from its protecting bell jar, he took a slotted box of slides from a drawer beneath. “There are

samples here for comparison to help you identify what you should find." He carried the microscope himself ahead of Shannon up the stairs to his laboratory table and set it down tenderly. "I am trusting you to be very careful with this," he said severely.

When he was gone, Shannon drew his stool into position and gingerly tested the controls of the microscope. It was a beautiful instrument with double, shielded oculars. An attached tag read: Property of Herman W. Schleicher. Shannon tipped the reflecting mirror to light from his table lamp, selected a slide at random from Schleicher's box, inserted it, and leaned forward. He barely touched the focus adjustment and caught his breath. The architectural world of plant photosynthesis sprang brilliantly into view. Chloroplasts were visible—dead, miniature laboratories for the photochemical carbon fixation which sustained all life. Eagerly Shannon scanned the indexed list of box contents on the inside of the lid for more slides helpful in his experiment but yielded to the temptation in other titles. The time of night, the empty tables and his immediate purpose became forgotten as he peered. Scent of Schleicher's good tobacco had followed them into the laboratory, and Shannon lighted a cigarette, unconscious of the training ration he had fixed upon himself. He browsed through the marvelous, secret world of spores to fungus growth; of pollen and seed cell structures in all stages of union; of animal sperms and eggs that beckoned each other for fertilization—chemistry as in photosynthesis insatiable to the end for perpetuating living tissue. It was an hour before he remembered himself and the illustrations which must accompany his chemical computations, drawings made swift and easy by professional examples at hand.

Shannon could not identify one of his slides and took it to Schleicher's office when he returned the microscope. The professor looked at it for him. "You have dissected diseased leaf tissue." Dexterously he edged the slide about, his constant touch on the focus adjustment feather-like. Finally he stepped back for Shannon to look. "Note the infiltration of healthy tissue here by abnormal cells and retaliatory resistance of the normal ones by way of attempting to seal them off into dormancy. This type of evidence convinced me early in my studies that in biochemistry the answer to the riddle of life would be found."

Shannon gazed long and searchingly through the lenses. He took a deep breath as he raised his head. "If the answer is ever found, Sir."

"It will be," said Schleicher. "Perhaps not during your life span or mine." He looked at Shannon. "No doubt more of the laboratory plant from which you obtained this specimen is infested. You might find it in-

teresting to make a series of slides over an interval to observe the outcome of the struggle and new resources of attack or defense."

"It certainly would be interesting." Shannon paused, hesitating. "Frankly, Sir, I'm afraid I wouldn't follow it through. I'm finding it hard to keep up regular assignments. I couldn't stay in school without my athletic scholarship, and football practice takes all my spare time. Besides," he added, grinning, "I love to play."

Professor Schleicher smiled. "I was discus and javelin champion at Heidelberg," he said and smiled again. "You are young with time to find yourself." He paused as his face went grave—"If the war doesn't spoil your life." Then as if disliking his seriousness he threw up his hands in dismissal. "Come, I will release you."

Outside, Shannon headed for an all-night sandwich house. His stomach felt empty but much of his hunger was gone and he strolled. Profs always thought their own fields all-important, and Schleicher had tried to lure him on. Yet declining him had not offended. Shannon felt flattered and at the same time relieved that he had not involved himself. But why should Schleicher be so disturbed about the war? Unless being from the old countries made it seem closer.

Shannon had been left feeling mentally alert and read his history assignment at the lunch counter while he ate, and then over a second and third cup of coffee worked out on napkins two algebra problems which had held him stymied. When at last he walked home he cut across the campus, and Professor Schleicher's office-laboratory window was still a yellow square in the otherwise dark hall.

Chapter 36

Phil heard less and less frequently from Andy after war began in Europe, and his annual vacation was cancelled as well. On that he wrote: "The administration is altering plans to fit the changing foreign outlook, and some of us can't be spared away." Then late in 1916 after Phil had waited six weeks for a letter, Andy telephoned him one morning from Plainsboro.

"I just got in and want to talk with you, but I'm going on to Topeka. Bryan is to confer the Master Mason Degree on Governor Hodges this evening. Can you go down with me?"

Their train was sidetracked for passage of the express when Phil arrived. Andy, already aboard, raised a window to call to him and returned a sheaf of papers to his brief case as soon as Phil entered. They rode in

the half empty smoking car facing each other, jolting and swaying in the hard double seats.

Andy asked at once of the farmers' attitude toward the war.

"They hardly know there is one or care," Phil said. "If they wonder how long it will last, it's because they'd like to know how much higher it will raise wheat prices."

"Don't you think they want the Allies to win?"

"Well, Henri Loubet's French blood boils to hang the Kaiser, and Mike Kelly hopes old England's hour has come."

Andy grinned. "I can practically see Henri's black eyes popping. But I mean other people, generally."

"They've been turned against Germany by propaganda of atrocities."

Andy looked directly and seriously into Phil's face. "It is best that America should be."

"I don't see why." Phil's gaze clashed with Andy's in the quick wave of warmth he felt, and neither dropped his. "Those damned nations over there are always fighting."

"We can't help condemning things like invading Belgium," Andy said. "The Germans promised not to in black and white treaties and then called them scraps of paper."

"In international diplomacy any nation will double-cross any other nation whenever it's to its advantage."

"Yes, but some are honester than others."

"If you're going to talk morality, the most important thing for us or anybody else is to be fair."

Andy leaned back in his seat, looking away, shaking his head. He took a cigar from his shirt pocket, bit off the end and lighted it. "You're much like Bryan in views," he said, "but it isn't easy for a President to set aside principles he believes in with all his heart, when he holds the balance of power to make them respected."

"Is Wilson thinking of taking us into the mess? Is that what you're driving at?"

"I didn't say that."

"He'd never get my vote if I thought so. My boys would have to serve and—" Phil stopped as if an admission had sprung from him unawares.

"There would be a lot he wouldn't get," Andy said. "We'll stay neutral if there is any honorable way. Bryan will see to that. But it's going to be hard. You hear a lot of talk among Congressmen about the debt we've owed France ever since the Revolution, and it arouses people on the coast to see ships torpedoed right off our shores—"

Phil's voice rose in interruption. "They are British ships hauling the munitions our war profiteers sell them."

His vehemence turned the heads of near people down the aisle.

"I admit there is that pressure. It must be the Bismark in you that gives it top place," said Andy, trying to grin to loosen tension. "Bayonets with ideas on their points."

Phil's response was a hard smile foreign and mechanical. He felt ridiculous at the passenger attention he had drawn to himself and struck out thoughtlessly though he restrained his voice. "If Wilson is so damned pious, why doesn't he boycott everybody fighting!" Andy winced and Phil wished immediately he had not resorted to insinuation. Phil felt sure he was right and Andy wrong, but his angry character deprecation made him feel cheap and cornered and he could not blame Andy for promptly withdrawing from argument. He picked up his brief case and coldly returned to his papers.

"I had no grounds to deprecate the President," he said. "I apologize."

Andy looked up in a stare that broke over quickly into a smile. "I wish you could know him as I do," he said, almost reverentially.

"It wouldn't change my opinion about war," Phil warned.

"No," Andy said, nodding his head, "and he hates it as you do."

"Well, why doesn't he speak out against British propaganda of Germans conquering the world that's scaring people? You and I know they can't do that."

"Not now," said Andy slowly, "but it may not be impossible in another fifty years if Germany wins. If that happens and we wait till then, the chance we have now may never come again."

"Chance for what?"

Andy thrust the papers back into his brief case and leaned forward for privacy. "To make the whole world one democracy. Ever since Wilson's offer to mediate an armistice was rejected, he and advisors have been planning a big international league of nations pledged to prevent any more wars. They've been working on it almost day and night, and Wilson has it down to a clear code of fourteen points. If we should fight, that is what it will be for."

Phil could not scoff in the face of Andy's earnestness. Firmly he said, "You can't name me a major war in history that was fought without slogans of freedom and lasting peace."

"Maybe not, but from Wilson it isn't propaganda, and nobody can accuse us of it. He asks nothing for the United States except a peaceful world to live in." Andy moved to the seat beside Phil to make doubly sure of not being overheard. "Wilson's league is patterned after our govern-

ment. If you can have a United States of America, you can have one of Europe and of the world, and Wilson will propose just that as soon as it's ended, while all peoples are so sick and tired they never want to fight again. If we should have to help the Allies win, you can be sure that Wilson made their leaders agree to his peace plan first."

The confidential fervency of Andy's lowered voice and expression seemed to Phil as ludicrous as he had seen himself to be after emotional denouncement of Wilson. "It's the only thing on earth I'd go through another Cuba for," Andy was saying. Phil looked away from his cousin's face out the window and saw posts flitting by. He remembered the crucial moments in his Topeka office just before Andy had left for war, and he felt as he then had that he must say the right thing to jolt him to earth. When he turned back directly to Andy's eyes he asked quietly: "What if we should get into this war and not win it?"

"That is unthinkable. God, man, America lose!"

"One side or the other always has to. We've been lucky in history, fought five times and never been beaten. That can't go on forever."

"Wilson knows that. I've heard him say a British fleet won't always stand between us and danger and we've got to stop wars once and for all. If you had gone to Washington and seen and heard our President, you would just know he could do it. He gives you a feeling of destiny."

Andy paused for Phil to give answer if he wished, but Phil was not ready. He was staring again outside at plotted farms of corn and wheat stubble whirling by. Destiny? But where and when? Life was like this scene before his eyes, a great onward passage of rushing things—over you, past you. The sight seemed to symbolize futility of attempting to guide or yet to remain apart. Phil remembered reading long ago in school that no one could escape history. It was a river flowing forever. The individual might sometimes swim around for a while in a little eddy of his own making, but the main stream kept reaching out and sucking him into it. And now it threatened to drag Shannon in.

Andy resumed speaking, and Phil through thoughts continued to hear words rich and disturbing with assurance. "I wish every American could know what a great man the President is. Wilson lacks the politician's knack for arousing the masses. He is so far-sighted he gives a first impression of being distant and cold, and only those close to him get to see him as he is inside. He loves the common man and believes in him. He wants life made better for him all over the world—"

Abruptly Phil interrupted the flow of speech without turning back because he did not want to see Andy's flushed face and shining eyes. "What's

become of his plan of improving his own country for the good of its common men?"

"We don't need to make jobs now. There hasn't been unemployment since the British and French flooded us with war orders. It was a great disappointment to the President to postpone his program of peacetime development."

"I can understand that after what happened to my own," Phil said quietly.

"It has only been set aside for the moment to get world peace established," said Andy, rubbing his hands.

"I saw mine set aside for the moment and it's been twenty years," said Phil. He drew a long breath. "I believed in my program, and I believed in Wilson's that New Year's Eve at Jim's in spite of the obstacles I saw ahead of it, because I wanted to and because I knew it was right and some good would come out of it just as there was a little from mine before the country went crazy on war. I fought to save my program and couldn't, but if Wilson's is destroyed he'll have done it himself."

"Oh, but he isn't destroying it! That's just what I've been showing you. He's giving it to the world to save it!" cried Andy.

He desperately wants me to believe and yet I can't in such things any more, thought Phil, staring into the flying landscape of fields and homes. Unaccountably he saw Electra with face aglow announcing the news that at last she and Hal were to have a child. Right out there was the concrete good worth saving, the security of loved ones, but again Andy could not see the juggernaut. A creek appeared to Phil's vision, cutting across the right-of-way, and then came hollow thunder of cars on trestles. This pattern was almost ironically perfect, for life was thunderous too at times.

Andy talked on and on, and Phil heard him more and more as if from afar. In one area of his mind emerged the picture being set forth of the great dreamer in the White House and the fearful burden of utopianism in a blood-crazed world; but his thoughts were of the marvel that any leader could maintain faith in his ability to perfect the world and incite followers as had happened to Andy. What made such people keep trying—only to make themselves miserable in failure?

"I'll probably enlist if we have to go to war," Andy finished at last. "I'll be of more value in uniform than anywhere else after my experience in the cavalry."

"You were a young fool then and you'll be an old one now if you do," Phil told him.

Andy winced. "I'm still in my forties."

Phil shook his head. "They don't even use cavalry any more."

"I can't feel I was a fool," Andy said, "even for going with Teddy. War can bring out the best in men as well as the worst. Oscar Karns taught me that down in Cuba, and I couldn't have learned it anywhere else. In fact, I learned more about human beings during my time in the Rough Riders than in all the rest of my life—"

"Jesus Christ, Andy, you didn't learn anything!" Phil wheeled upon him with the words, and Andy turned too so that they sat squared away face to face, and each saw in the other conviction unweakened.

Andy relaxed first. "I was afraid you'd still say what you did before. Well, this time we don't have to quarrel about it."

"That is right," said Phil, and subsided likewise.

They looked away, neither knowing how to relieve the strain, and rode in silence until the train slowed and began jolting over the switches and crossings of Topeka. They leaned together to the window for the first glimpse of the Capitol.

Andy had reservations at Hotel Throop and after checking in they visited the state house. The legislature was not in session, but Andy looked into the empty Hall of Representatives and his gaze rested on the seat he had occupied. "You missed quite a time the day we got throwed out these windows," he said, and Phil laughed.

"I don't suppose these state capitols seem very important to you any more."

"The one in Washington is no different," Andy said, "just bigger."

In mutual consent they stopped for coffee in the little basement restaurant they had both frequented.

By time for evening lodge meeting estrangement between them was gone. "We'll find Bryan among the officers," Andy said, on the white marble steps before the hall. "I'll be acting Senior Deacon."

"When I lectured here they didn't have this new temple," said Phil. "We rented an upstairs floor over the City Bank."

Andy led the way down a crowded corridor through smoking, chatting brethren who spoke with a show of deference to him and gazed enviously at Phil close at his cousin's elbow. A slight grimacing lifted the corners of Andy's mouth after he had nodded and smiled repeatedly. "It's this way wherever Bryan goes now," he murmured to Phil, "but you can remember the time we found him alone in a hotel. At times I've wished I had never heard of government politics." Outside the oak doors to the main lodge hall, Andy gave his name and Phil's to the Tyler. "There is a seat reserved for my friend."

Inside, Phil stood still. The ceiling rose cross-vaulted and austere; and

on all sides multitudes of faces in the surrounding balcony dwindled backwards to dim miniatures. High in the East a single star burned clearly in the air, there free of tobacco smoke. In the center of the room stood the altar with leather Bible still unopened. There was a steady blurring sound of multiple subdued voices conversing, and the heavy, gray carpet silenced footfalls of those moving. Breezes from fans stirred the dark drapes cloaking the windows and occasionally swayed the unadorned square and compasses hanging on invisible suspension above the Master's chair.

Andy steered Phil around and between clusters of men and into a large group gathered about Bryan and introduced him.

The Nebraskan was grayed and heavier of waistline than in Populist days and his broad forehead bald all the way back over his crown, but the large, luminous eyes looked down unfaded. Bryan's routine handshake and mechanical word of greeting stirred in Phil a sense of loss, for it brought him to recognize that wholly without reason he had continued to think of the Great Commoner as someone intimate.

When Phil stepped back out of the crowd that hemmed Bryan, he went to his reserved seat in the front row—silent and remembering, gazing at Bryan's great head towering above those around him. Twenty years ago in the Throop lobby I predicted that he would rise again. He can't have forgotten, or he would never have written me to come to Washington. Well, I didn't go, and I guess he doesn't have time to talk of what happened twenty years ago.

Phil hardly noticed the lodge called to order or visiting dignitaries duly introduced and welcomed until Bryan was conducted to the East. Then he straightened and leaned forward as the Master presented the honorary gavel and bowed Bryan to the presiding chair. Moments later Phil sat again entranced with a crowd as the old silvery oratory rolled out, giving new beauty to the lodge lectures.

Andy took Phil aside after the degree was conferred. "I can't go with you to the banquet," he said. "Bryan wants me at his hotel as quick as I can get there. He has had important news from Washington. I'll join you in our room afterwards as soon as I can."

When Andy arrived at the plain, small room occupied by Bryan in Hotel Throop, the Secretary of State was already there writing, bent ponderously over his desk in frowning concentration. He had answered by voice to the knock, momentarily half glancing up as Andy closed the door. Bryan's worn campaign brief case lay open and empty before him, the flap and straps folded beneath it. There were two sheaves of paper on his desk, one thin and neatly clipped, the other spread out. For a

couple of minutes he continued busy over the latter. Then he laid aside his pen, picked up the clipped sheaf and turned his chair sideways. Lines of deep concern about his eyes tightened instead of relaxing.

"General Pershing has been ordered with troops to the Mexican border. That can only mean that the President has decided on a firm stand against Germany with Villa as an excuse for training."

"Yes." Though startled, Andy stood unquestioning like a soldier waiting orders.

"I can't go on to the West coast with you. I must get back to Washington to slow things down." Bryan handed Andy the several pages. "Here is the campaign plan I had for us out there. Sit down and go through it now and see if you have any questions."

Bryan sat back with one arm on his desk, watching Andy's expressions as he read. He drummed his fingers while he waited. Clearly he had the contents memorized, for Andy felt his sharpened scrutiny at important sections. Andy asked nothing when he had finished.

"You may keep the plan," Bryan said. "I don't have to tell you to guard it."

"No, sir."

Bryan kept up his searching gaze. "You'll have to organize this alone out there."

Andy felt the surge of a great thrill.

"Play California particularly," Bryan continued. "It will likely be the key state."

The wave of goose pimples that had risen along Andy's spine spread across his back and shoulders and down his arms. He controlled his voice. "I'll handle it."

"I know you can, for I trained you myself. There's a train out in two hours. Now is there anything else?"

Phil's simple question of possible defeat for America if involved had been re-occurring to trouble Andy all evening. He hesitated, wondering if it would sound unpatriotic to ask it himself and carefully phrased his words. "Are we militarily certain that America's entrance will decide the war for the Allies?"

"Militarily yes, but we don't want that!" Bryan sat forward abruptly. "America must be the deciding power at the peace, not in the fighting. Britain and France must not emerge victoriously demanding indemnities and sacrifices of the German people that will build hatreds for another war. It is essential our President keep that thought always before him if his League of Nations is to succeed!"

Andy stared at Bryan, who paused to draw breath, saw that his big

knuckles had grown white on the arms of his chair; and unaccountably the sight brought a chilling vision of Wilson's slim, artistic wrists being caught and crushed by the heavy palms. "The President has stated there should be peace without victory," Andy said.

"That was early in the war when we all saw neutrality clearly, before this dangerous and growing tendency of his to place right on the side of the Allies. The President doesn't see the desperation of necessity in the acts of Germany and that Britain or France if underdogs would do the same or worse."

Bryan rose to his feet and stood towering, as Andy had seen him face opponents in rebuttal. "We cannot judge the moral stature of nations by current crimes! The President condemns submarine warfare as acts of piracy, but Queen Elizabeth's freebooters sank Spanish galleons. He deplores the invasion of Belgium; yet the empires of Britain and France were built on conquests of weaker peoples. It is the whole history of imperialism that America must rise to condemn. She must stand forth as a mighty symbol in freedom and justice unbiased to the world if she would lead the way to lasting peace."

Bryan strode about the room. His massive head was back and his big nostrils dilated as if defying a hostile audience, and his hairy right fist beat and twisted against the other palm. "There is no right side in this war, and not one drop of precious American blood shall be shed in behalf of either. Let them fight to exhaustion. Let them bleed each other white and helpless. Then they can be brought to see the futility in dreams of aggression." Bryan stopped beside his desk and tapped his fingers on the sheets spread there. "That is the difference between my plan and the President's. He believes he can negotiate with victors. I say he can never negotiate just peace among leaders still in command of the might to back unjust demands."

Bryan looked directly at Andy and seemed for the first time to see the amazement which Andy could not conceal and which announced clearly: we must not oppose the President. Bryan colored and came to stand before him. He spoke quietly and conversationally once more. "Don't think I am attacking our President; I am trying to help him. My plan will be finished and down in black and white offered for his judgment when I reach Washington. I believe our neutrality can be preserved through him, for we know he sincerely renounces war as an instrument of national policy. I think it time to tell you also that Wilson will ask me to resign if he loses to Hughes in November. Wilson is going to appoint him Secretary of State. Then he and Vice President Marshall will also resign, automatically placing Hughes in office without waiting for inauguration.

Wilson is determined not to impede a president-elect's policies in so critical a period."

Andy drew a long breath. "It takes a great man to make such a sacrifice."

"The greatest. So you see our neutrality depends upon his re-election as well as his re-election upon our neutrality, but he doesn't realize how close the race will be. That is why I must stay at hand in Washington from now on. Anything in the nature of a public ultimatum to Germany would be his political suicide. It would destroy our paramount issue in the West: he kept us out of war."

"I'll play that for all it's worth!" Andy said.

"Do." Bryan paused, a thoughtful half-grin touching his lips. "What a jolt to the political prestige of New York and Pennsylvania if their great blocs of votes fail to swing the election! It's time that should happen. The best people in our nation live in the West. I wish I could have the pleasure of working among them again, but it's your job now." Once more he paused, and now a light of time and distance came into his eyes. "Do it well, Andrew. If the West decides this election it may also decide the future of the world."

Andy threw back his head. "I'll handle it," he repeated.

"Of course you will." Bryan thrust out his hand. "Good luck, and God be with you."

When Andy turned to close the door in leaving, Bryan was already back at his desk, gripping his pen and bending over his papers. He'll work all night, Andy thought, and again tomorrow aboard his train, and Wilson will choose the best from it. Bryan is making history, and I'm helping him! We both know we must re-elect the President. Unconsciously Andy held himself very straight and walked with determined strides down the hall.

Phil was waiting for Andy in their room. He had a whiskey bottle with glass and ice and half a dozen good cigars on the stand between two chairs, preparation for a night long discussion of national policies. He had determined to make one last attempt to convince Andy, and this time he would not let himself become irritated. He stood up ready as soon as Andy opened the door.

"Well, what was that news from Washington?"

"Bryan has to go back. He wanted to review West coast campaign plans with me. I have to go organize alone—tonight."

"Oh."

Andy's eyes followed Phil's disappointed glance to the stand. "Mix me one. I'll have time for that. Plain water."

Phil put whiskey and ice in the glass before he went to the bathroom tap. When he came back Andy had his suitcases open on the bed. He took a swallow of his drink and set it on the dresser, and as he packed he told of his new assignment. He stopped suddenly and looked at Phil. "Why don't you come with me to California?"

"God, Andy, I couldn't do that—leave the farm and family without notice."

"No—no, I guess you couldn't. It would be wonderful working together again. I'm almost scared of taking on something so big alone."

"You can do it."

"I'd better be able to, because I have to." Andy took another drink and began telling of Bryan's return to consult with the President on his plan for America as a mighty power for peace in the world.

He did not tell of Pershing being sent to the Mexican border or of any possible rift between Wilson and Bryan. He did not want to risk Phil rising to lead a revolt. Such a thing could spread beyond local boundaries, and he feared he had unwisely said too much about intervention, that Phil meant to bring up the question again. So he spoke rapidly as if Bryan's plan were the accepted one. "Bryan is convinced that America need not and should not enter the war."

While Andy talked, Phil sat on the edge of the other bed, turning his glass round and round and following Andy's purposeful movements in silence. Andy's assignment had changed the whole trend of his thinking. Andy had never forsaken his youth's dream of national prominence, and it had come true. This was his great opportunity, and it might have been mine too. Phil's thoughts aroused no envy, only a melancholy sense of his own uselessness and of life slipping away. He did not stir until Andy explained Wilson's intentions of resigning if Hughes were elected on a war platform. Phil got up abruptly then, walked over and stood at the window, staring out. The dome of the Capitol was still spotlighted white by the dozen shafts focused nightly upon it.

Andy stopped his activities and looked at him there. "Don't you agree he should not hold up the new President-elect's policies after the voters have spoken?"

Phil answered slowly without turning. "It occurred to me that he might be doing a great deal more. It might lead to abandonment of lame duck sessions—in the strange way that one thing leads to another."

Andy nodded. "Yes, I remember we wanted that too under the Populists." A moment later he closed his suitcase and swallowed the rest of

his drink. "I wish I could have had more time with you, but you can ride with me to the train."

"Of course," Phil said.

They had time only for a cup of coffee at the station counter after Andy had bought his ticket. "It's pretty nice," Andy grinned as he sipped, "even sleeper accommodations at Government expense. We're not supposed to for a political trip."

Phil smiled also. "I guess that's never been different. I recall we always managed to get our bills paid wherever we traveled under Governor Leedy."

He went with Andy through the gate into the dim light of station yard, and walked with him alongside the cars of the train where it waited with long, black engine hissing off steam. They stood together beside the darkened Pullman and waited to shake hands until the last all-aboard had been called and the wheels began to turn.

Phil did not stay to watch the train out of sight. He went at once back to the lunch room. Sitting very much alone on the same stool he had occupied at Andy's elbow he toyed with another cup of coffee, staring most of the time at the counter. The feeling had been left with him stronger than ever that for the first time life was truly passing him by. There was left for him now only intervals of complacency in the comfortable financial situation he had achieved and from the knowledge of a respected family all doing well. Tonight he had fierce need to know that those complacent intervals could lengthen and become sufficient; and tonight intuitively he feared more than ever that they never could bring him total inner peace.

On the steps as he left the station Phil looked for the Capitol again, but it was past midnight and the lights which spotted it had been turned off. As he searched for its outline the moon came through sailing clouds and for one moment gilded the dome, then it was again eclipsed; and against the void of the horizon he could not even make out its rounded contour beneath which he had once had influence. He hesitated as a taxi went by, its driver slowing and looking toward him, but he did not hail it. He began walking, and in his solitude the past familiarity of these urban surroundings welled up through him. Block after block of deserted sidewalk he put behind him with steady stride, the heel-clips of his square country shoes echoing faintly on the concrete, and the wistfulness he could not put aside continued to grow.

"I'm better off than any of them," he muttered. "Andy and Bryan have their faith in the President and his League of Nations. They are all

driving themselves as I did in the Populist cause, and in the end they'll see it come to nothing as Populism did. I learned and Andy didn't, that's all the difference." All this Phil uttered half aloud the better to convince himself, and then shivered inwardly at his desperate effort to believe what he could not believe, for life is desolate and cold without some confidence in human progress.

He cut across a park to save distance, keeping to a sanded walk, for dew lay everywhere over the grass like frosted silver. The lanes, deserted at that late hour, would have been dark but for the moon. The clouds were scattering more and more, and directly overhead the orb swam through billow masses—full, white, and impregnable. Beside a lily pool he loitered, looking up at the sky and then down at its reflection in the water. What was the meaning of the great dreams of men if they came to nothing? If? But they do come to nothing. I have seen it happen over and over. Andy has seen it happen this last year to Wilson's plan for public improvement. How can he believe in a new and more impossible utopia of a world league?

Coldly and rationally Phil told himself the dream was folly, that nations had slaughtered since the beginning of nations and would continue to slaughter; and as he did another independent and clairvoyant part of his mind was whispering that it was not folly, that the dreams themselves were the reality. He tried to silence the rebellious intuition; but the night was irreconcilable to blood and war, so perfect, serene and sweet that he found himself overcome and at sea with the marvel of it. The answer to all man had ever sought seemed everywhere about him in the moonlight. It was so near to him in his receptive mood that it brushed the senses. He stood very still, shivering again acutely and uncontrollably, while his eyes, seeking to pierce space, grew wide and dilated and the skin over his cheek bones drew taught. Unconsciously he started walking softly, purposefully, turning into the shadows of a lane, his every faculty awake and mystically attuned to the silent, whispering night.

It was a real and human whisper that broke the spell and halted him again moments later. Ahead, a couple content with themselves only had hidden in a wide park chair beside the path. The boy reclined with head in the girl's lap, and as Phil saw them she bent and kissed his lips lightly. They both laughed soft delight. Her hand looked very white where it lay in a splash of moonlight on the arm rest. The boy reached out one of his own and stroked it.

Phil edged quietly aside into the deepest shade and turned back the way he had come. If he chose another path from the pool and continued to

walk thus aimlessly, perhaps the breathless, pregnant moment would return to communicate with him. He would try.

A lamp gleamed through branches; and the downtown district threw up a red glare against the sky. And while Phil wandered, struggling before the great secret, and the lovers spooned; while Andy was rushed westward asleep in his berth and Bryan toiled on to perfect his peace plan—the *Lusitania* sailed to meet her fate.

Chapter 37

News of the big liner's tragic end reached Andy while on the West Coast. Beneath headlines was a list of American passengers lost and announcement of a Cabinet meeting called. Within twenty-four hours Andy had completed his political alignments and headed back to Washington.

In the club car of the mainline train he read the newspaper text of the note from the State Department to the German ambassador condemning the sinking. I would be away when the terrific happened, he thought. It seemed inconceivable as he sat thrilling with excitement and anger that fellow passengers should be pleasantly smoking and drinking, and talking of prices and industrial contracts and profits. You may not realize it yet, he thought, looking about at faces, but Bryan is aroused now. From here on Germany had better watch her step and damned close too. It did not occur to Andy that Bryan could be otherwise than indignant or that he had signed under protest the note as dictated by Wilson.

Andy went to Bryan's office directly on arrival and was admitted as soon as announced. Bryan closed a folder on his desk as Andy entered. The brown cover bore two words stamped in bold black: *LUSITANIA* SECRET. Andy looked with fascination upon it through a long moment that Bryan frowned in preoccupation before rising from his chair. Cordially he held out his huge hand. "I'm glad you are back, Andrew." Standing, he listened intently, nodding satisfaction through Andy's report on his assignment. At the end he asked one question. "How have people back West taken the *Lusitania*?"

"I was astonished how little attention was paid to it."

Bryan nodded again. "I shall tell the President that, and I shall certainly also tell him how well you have done your work."

A gush of pleasure warmed Andy through at that promise.

"I hope your trip and work will not now have been for nothing," Bryan added.

Andy looked at him quickly, questioningly, then his gaze irresistibly

turned to the secret folder. "I should have thought such a sinking would arouse the country to demand action," he said; and suddenly his fists clinched as they had when he first read the headlines. "How can we just stand by when all those Americans were killed!"

Bryan smiled faintly at the intensity of Andy's feelings. "It was a terrible thing, but we must avoid rash action," he said. "The sinking may not have been intended by the German government in which case they will pay and apologize, or the *Lusitania* may have been a marked ship before she left port."

"What can possibly justify marking a passenger liner?"

"That we must learn—providing she was marked. We are investigating. I have put Mr. Grimes and my best staff members to work on it. I want you to help Grimes check authenticity of a report that Alfred Vanderbilt was warned not to go aboard. Find out whether other passengers received warnings. I have to know before the Cabinet meets again tomorrow." He stopped, fixing his deep, luminous brown eyes on Andy. "I know I can trust you to bring me facts, whatever they be and however you yourself feel about them."

"I will tell you exactly what I learn."

"Good. If the Germans had military cause for sinking the *Lusitania*, it must be recognized regardless of humanitarian sentiments. Meet me here for the Cabinet session. I want you to take complete notes on this meeting—every word everybody says."

Andy accepted the nod of dismissal with which Bryan returned to his desk, but he left the office unable to suppress the inner struggle reawakened and heightened. He felt forced at last to face the question: can I continue working with Bryan in his growing rift with the President? As soon as he had clearly asked it, Andy knew with a sick feeling that he would not be able to go on. For a moment he stood still at a sudden mental image of Vivian with all her pride in him for his promotions gone and her miserable struggle to keep dismay hidden at news of his resignation. Time and again unobtrusive in the background, she had given wise counsel that had helped him upward.

Lunch hour had come and Andy moved with office workers down the steps. Andy had lost appetite; yet he crossed the street to a lunch counter and ordered a cheese sandwich well toasted. He ate perfunctorily, washing each bite down with coffee, while his mind dwelt miserably upon his problem. I shall have to tell Bryan soon that I must leave him. It is the only fair thing. I shall tell him when this investigation he has asked of me is finished. I cannot assist in opposing policy of the President. No honest man can devote himself effectively against his sympathies.

Vivian will understand that—and so will Bryan, for I have heard him say it himself. Yet though Andy knew beyond doubt that Bryan would understand, instead of relief the decision to resign brought a burning to his eyes with the sensation he had known as a child when fighting back tears, and a lump in his throat prevented swallowing the last of his sandwich; for he knew also that all he had become in Washington he owed to his wife and to the Nebraskan.

Andy went to Grimes's office promptly at one o'clock, but his investigative assignment for which he had no heart had already been completed. The telegram to Vanderbilt had been found and photostated. Grimes showed Andy a copy: HAVE IT ON DEFINITE AUTHORITY *LUSITANIA* IS TO BE TORPEDOED. YOU HAD BETTER CANCEL PASSAGE IMMEDIATELY.

"A couple dozen other passengers are supposed to have received the same message, but most of them threw theirs away," Grimes said impersonally. "They were all plain damned fools."

The paper shook in Andy's hand and his voice rose. "Nobody on earth could believe they would dare sink an unarmed liner."

"I could." Grimes spoke on unemotionally as if unawares of Andy's vehemence. "It's completely unrestricted submarine warfare from here out, and the Germans want it established to the whole world."

"And turn the whole world against them!" Andy cried.

"It was against them anyway," Grimes said. He shrugged in complacent satisfaction of the effectiveness with which he had investigated. "The information was requested, and I collected it. It's not my job to take sides."

Andy moistened his lips to retort; then he saw the secretary listening. He left the room without speaking further.

When Andy went with Bryan to the Cabinet meeting the following day, Bryan carried his frayed brief case as always in his own hand. As always he placed it on the table before him and at once unbuckled the straps and folded them with the flap neatly underneath. Andy took a seat at his left rear with shorthand pad. He exchanged nods with a second note clerk sitting behind Navy Secretary Daniels.

Bryan greeted those present with an encompassing turn of his head, but he did not enter their conversation. Andy saw uneasy glances. The discussions slackened and became forced.

Bryan pushed his chair back to stretch the full length of his legs before him and studied the marble slab surfacing the long table. In profile his face held the expression of a man satisfied with a grave decision but still

tense from preoccupation with it. He seemed unaware of later entrances of colleagues.

All were assembled early, and all eyes watched the private doorway as the clock turned near the appointed time. Exactly as the minute hand reached its mark the door opened. Everyone stood as the President entered and crossed with quick, nimble steps the carpeted floor to his chair. Wilson bowed slightly and took his seat. "Thank you, gentlemen." They all sat down in unison after him.

Andy's heartbeats quickened to thumps when Wilson's gaze traveled the circle of faces and stopped upon him. "Mr. York, I thank you personally for your excellent work on the West Coast."

The pressure already in Andy's throat tightened. He swallowed painfully against it, flushed, and dropped his eyes. When he looked up again, Wilson had sat back in pedantic erectness in his chair with fingers interlaced upon the table. He spoke slowly with perfect enunciation, his flow of words so precisely paced it seemed to Andy they must have been memorized.

"Gentlemen, you are all familiar with the torpedoing without warning of the unarmed liner, *Lusitania*, with loss of hundreds of lives. Your government has protested that sinking to the German government. In reply the German government offers no apology, rejects our demands that the commander of the submarine be punished, and gives no promise that similar atrocities will not be committed in the future. The German government regrets the loss of American lives but reiterates necessity for its announced policy of unrestricted submarine attacks upon the shipping of Great Britain and her allies. In view of this entirely unsatisfactory reply, it is necessary that your government send a second, stronger diplomatic protest, one of solemn warning to the German government that military action if necessary will be taken to safeguard lives of Americans traveling upon international high seas. Are you in agreement, gentlemen?"

There was a rapid succession of nods about the table, except for Bryan's towering head which remained conspicuously motionless. Through Wilson's speech Andy had glanced repeatedly at Bryan, drawn to watch the set face and the large knuckles turning white and red as his fingers gripped and re-gripped a dark arm of his chair. Now Bryan rose at once ponderously to his feet, his expression more than ever that of a determined man driving himself to take an unavoidable risk early in order to have the results wholly behind him. His voice broke harshly loud in contrast to the President's.

"I cannot approve. No American ships have been sunk. Our citizens have been advised of the hazards of sailing on Allied vessels; it has been

so advertised repeatedly in our own newspapers. The most prominent American lost with the *Lusitania*, Alfred G. Vanderbilt, received a personal telegram warning him the ship would be sunk. I am told it was thrust into his own hands while passing through the crowd to board her. Yet he disregarded it."

Bryan paused. Andy looked with him around the table to the President. Wilson's lips were drawn down tightly pursed, giving his thin, triangular face the unpleasant expression of an obligated listener.

"We have all heard rumors to that effect," he said.

"It was not rumor! My department has possession of the warning telegram."

Wilson's lips parted only a little in a short, intaken breath, but mouths of several Cabinet members went slack. Other faces still registered disbelief.

Bryan reached into his brief case. "I have copies for your examination." The first photostat was passed directly to the President. He read it through once without change of expression.

"This is unsigned and may well be the work of a crank," he said.

"It would be a remarkable coincidence, Mr. President. More than twenty American passengers received warnings from various addresses."

Still holding the telegram, Wilson looked over it very steadily at Bryan. "If authentic this fully condemns the German government of intentional sinking, but the authenticity has nothing to do with the obligation of our government to protect our citizens as neutrals." He handed back the paper matter-of-factly.

"If I may say so, Mr. President, it has never been and should never become the policy of the United States to protect citizens against foolish or needless risks. I beg that the language of the protest under consideration be modified, or if threat of military reprisals be retained that equally severe terms be imposed at once and fearlessly upon Great Britain and her allies. Otherwise this nation cannot stand before the world as an impartial neutral."

Andy stiffened at the last sentence, and the next moment blushed for his chief. However strong and sincere his difference of opinion, Bryan should not have disgraced self and office with this implication of prejudice in policies of the President. Andy saw in every Cabinet member reflection of his own shame and indignation, in every face the same unspoken thought: Resign if you must to preserve your integrity, but never insult the President. A swell of warm admiration rose to his chest that the President showed no sign of recognizing that he had been insulted.

Wilson answered Bryan almost gently. "Great Britain is not endangering American lives."

Without sign of retreat in his return gaze, Bryan reached into his brief case. Always the orator, he had reserved his ace for a climax; and as he held up a second paper, Andy saw on it the official seal of the State Department. Bryan's voice rolled. "I must beg leave to disagree with the President. Great Britain *is* endangering American lives. In insisting upon freedom of seas for non-military passenger service we are within rights of International Law only when ships involved are concerned solely with passenger service. I have in my hand a copy of the *Lusitania's* cargo manifest listing four thousand two hundred cases of Springfield cartridges, and cartridges are munitions of war! Great Britain *has* been endangering American lives and deliberately. Great Britain has been *using our citizens as a shield for her ammunition!*" Bryan thumped his fist on the table with the damning document and slid it swiftly across the polished surface to the center. "There is the evidence. I ask permission to publish it!"

Bryan sat down even as Wilson was swiftly rising. "Upon whose authority did you carry out this investigation?"

"I acted of my own initiative," Bryan said.

"Why was I not consulted and advised of results as they came in?"

"In the interests of the nation I thought it best to make sure no statements could be issued until we had all the facts."

"In other words you feared I might stop you short of a full investigation?"

For a moment Bryan did not answer. Andy saw Wilson's face whiten beneath the eyes, but otherwise he controlled his emotions as he faced the Nebraskan; and Bryan with shoulders hunched a little gazed back as steadily. Secretary Daniels made an impulsive movement forward, opening and spreading his hands palms upward as if to break the deadlock; but an instant, simultaneous glance from both men arrested him. Slowly Bryan moistened his lips. "I believe the American public has a right to complete, uncensored facts."

"Nevertheless I instruct you to hold this information strictly confidential," Wilson said. "In the present world situation its publication would only confuse the real issue. Germany has absolutely no right to demand or expect judgment on basis of comparison with the activities of Great Britain or any other country. Nations, like individuals, must be judged on their own acts."

Bryan came back to his feet. It was the only time in any Cabinet meeting that Andy had seen a member rise while the President was standing. "Mr. President! I must insist we condemn Britain also. No other course

is fair to the Central Powers. The protest you have framed for Germany will have to be sent from my Department. Under the foreign policy you have prescribed, *I cannot sign it.*"

With both men thus erect, Wilson seemed almost frail before towering Bryan; and to Andy he was made the more dignified and indomitable by the contrast. In the instant the four words of commitment had been delivered by Bryan, Andy knew the outcome was settled; and it struck him flash-like as shortsighted in himself ever to have hoped this clash might not come. Bryan stood waiting with head proudly high. At least now I shall never have to tell him I can no longer work with him, Andy thought. But why, why has he punished himself and the President by forcing direct dismissal in a full Cabinet meeting? He must have believed other members would support him.

As if through distance as he pressed hard to keep the pencil steady on his paper Andy heard Wilson, words measured and clear as a pronouncement of sentence: "The note will be delivered as I have dictated it."

Bryan bowed respectfully and resumed his seat. He did not speak or stir during the brief remainder of the session, and Andy knew that his resignation would be on Wilson's desk within hours.

Bryan left the conference room first after the President, as was custom, then the other cabinet members in order of rank, all silent. Half way down the corridor behind them Andy halted to the impact of realization that Bryan's political foresight would be lost. "*I hope your trip will not now have been for nothing,*" he had said. With note-pad forgotten Andy started running to get to the Assistant Secretary of State's office before Lansing could be summoned to the President. He passed the desk girl outside the inner door, knocked and entered almost in the same motion. Lansing's head jerked up at the interruption. Andy closed the door and walked straight to the walnut table.

"You will soon be Secretary of State," he said.

Lansing's eyebrows lifted in cautious appraisal. "I might be requested to assume the duties of that post temporarily should it become vacant."

Andy raised his hand in impatience. "You've heard what just happened?"

Lansing nodded slightly. "An unfortunate difference of opinions. Perhaps it will be healed."

Andy answered with a shake of his head. "You know that I just returned from California. The President will not carry the West or be re-elected if people there believe we will enter the war. For God's sake

don't let him use the words *military action* in his note to Germany. It will nullify our paramount slogan: He kept us out."

"I see." Lansing studied Andy's tense face, considering. "You should know, Mr. York. Thank you for coming to me."

When Andy saw the text of the note in a newspaper a day later, the word "military" had been deleted.

Chapter 38

Strong warnings in Wilson's new notes to Germany drew a reluctant promise to cease unrestricted submarine warfare. Belated apologies were offered for sinkings of the *Arabic* and *Sussex*, and an uncertain truce established. After resigning Bryan supported Wilson politically, and Democrats held up to voters his paramount slogan: "He kept us out of war."

The night after election Maggie and Phil sat in the back seat of Hal's Ford touring car in the town square, watching returns. A projection lantern on a window ledge of the *Plainsboro Chronicle*, flashed votes as they came in onto the white-tiled upper front of the Foster Bank across the street. The night air was sharp and still and smelled of frost-bitten vegetation; the gathering of citizens jostling about sidewalks and the courthouse lawn wore overcoats, collars turned up around their throats.

Counts from the West were slow and the finish still in doubt despite a strong lead piled up by Hughes in the East.

The grocery stores were lighted for extra sales from the crowd. Maggie had been back to the car from trading long enough to transfer little Phillip from Phil's lap to hers and get him covered. She paid no attention to the election and was restless to start home. "I wonder what's keeping Hal and Electra so long?" she asked plaintively.

Phil took his pipe from his mouth without turning from a new set of figures. "MacGregor had patients ahead of them."

Phillip whimpered drowsily and shivering pressed against the warmth of his mother's bosom. Maggie pulled the robe higher and close. "I wish they'd come." Phil did not answer, and her thoughts turned to Electra, pregnant but ailing so that Hal had had to take her early and often to Dr. MacGregor. That was why he had bought a car.

An hour passed, and Maggie, watching the doorway, saw the pair emerge upon the steps. It was evident at once even in the poor street light that something was wrong. Hal's head bent low toward Electra's. He was talking, and his right hand rested on hers, passed under his other arm.

They came directly toward the car, and upon approach fright was apparent in the eyes of both.

At the car pinched terror suddenly engulfed Electra's small, lovely face. She leaned over the door and threw her arms around Maggie's neck. "I have to be operated on! I'm going to lose my baby!"

Phil turned with a snap from his election figures.

Trembling, breaking sentences poured from Electra in sobs. "They're—they want to take it. I won't give up my baby. No matter what happens to me, I won't. Maybe it's the only one I can have."

Hal put his arm about her shoulders. He forced desperate strength into his voice. "Don't cry, Electra. Don't break down. The doctor didn't say that. Anyway he didn't say it for sure."

"She's not going to be operated on," Maggie burst out. "When you go cutting into people, they're sure to die!"

"Hush," Phil commanded.

Hal turned direct to him. "What do you think, Dad?"

"What did MacGregor tell you was the matter?"

"Consumption."

"Jesus!" The word came on Phil's audibly intaken breath. "Well, Son, those who make doctoring their business ought to know best."

Hal pushed back his cap and ran his hand nervously through his hair. "Damn it, I don't know what to think. We've never had anything of this kind come up; it never occurred to me that it could happen. I wish you'd go back with me and hear the Doc for yourself."

Phil nodded, but in the fear that had smote him, he did not for a moment otherwise move. Complications had not occurred to him either when he left his own Electra behind in New York. He got out and held the car door open for Electra. "You come sit under the robe where I was, where it's warm." Obediently she released Maggie and got in.

The men crossed the street side by side and climbed the worn, ill-lighted stairs.

MacGregor shook Phil's hand as a friend. "I'm glad you came, but I wish it had been better news that brought you."

"Well, it's the first real bad thing you've ever had to tell my family, Doc," Phil said.

MacGregor placed chairs for them. "I know how much and how long both you and your wife have wanted children," he said to Hal.

"I wish to God I never had!" Hal burst out. "I got her into this."

The physician shook his head. "No," he said firmly, "and don't you ever say that to her." He sat also and looked at both men. "Electra is a born mother in attitudes. She always lived a clean, natural life. Why she

should be victim to complications in pregnancy is one of the twists doctors also find hard to accept."

"She's more worried about the child than herself," Hal said.

"I know, and you're more worried about her."

"What is it," Phil asked, "a case of losing one or both?"

"Naturally we can't *know*, but that is usually about the size of it. She can have her baby, but labor exertions will rupture diseased lung tissue and spread the infection—probably fatally."

"Save her first," Hal insisted.

"I would think that wisest myself," MacGregor said. "However, she wants it the other way."

"It doesn't matter what *she* wants. You mustn't let her die. I won't have that."

MacGregor studied Hal's miserable set face and watched the knuckles of his brown, roughened fists turn white in his lap. "If we're to be as certain of her as we can, the child should be taken at once. It is an added drain on her system. After that, proper food and plenty of rest with maybe some months in a sanatorium ought to halt the disease. The X-rays show only one lung spot."

Hal turned recklessly to Phil. "Let's have it done right away then! Isn't that what you say?"

"I wouldn't like to say anything. You came to Doc for advice. Suppose you let him do the deciding."

MacGregor smiled faintly as they both looked at him. It was the tired smile of one so long accustomed to responsibilities that he had ceased to find them altogether a burden. "We ought not ignore her wishes entirely," he said. "It could leave a terrible scar in her mind. If she could have proper diet, complete rest, and be examined every day—then if no new lung spots develop it would be fairly safe to try waiting. If Mrs. Barker will agree to a Caesarean as soon as the child has reached eight months, there will be some chance of saving them both." He turned his fine old eyes directly to Hal's. "Son, if she were my wife, her wishes being what they are, that is what I would urge her to do."

"Would it be better, Mac—any safer, if we sent her to a big clinic like the Mayos?" Phil asked.

"No," MacGregor said. "Our new Saint Luke's Hospital offers everything we could need, and Dr. Bade is a fine surgeon. Electra will be more at ease among you folks than with strangers."

"She could stay in town with my mother," Hal said instantly.

"I can think of no better place. I'd leave her tonight. And don't forget

what I told her about ventilation. A warm, warm bed with no drafts, but always plenty of pure, fresh air."

"Mother will see to it," Hal said. "She'll see to everything right."

"I'm sure she will. She knows how."

Hal took out his wallet as he stood up, but MacGregor shook his head. "Let that wait until she is home again."

Hal and Phil buttoned coats and went down the narrow, creaky stairs into night air. The street crowd had grown, with a hurly-burly confusion of hurrahing and waving hats countered by catcalls and jeers. On the fringes men were leaving—some talking excitedly, some silent with faces angry in disappointment. Others were elbowing their way in jubilant search of stakeholders to collect bets.

Phil read the dispatch in capitals on the tile wall: PRESIDENT WILSON WIRES CONGRATULATIONS TO HUGHES. It brought back the election. "God damn it!" he said. "Wilson was our only chance to stay out of war!" Hal did not lift his head or answer as they walked on.

It was not until Phil awoke next morning to new, troubled thoughts of Electra that he learned of California reversing the election.

Chapter 39

On January 31st before Wilson's re-inauguration, Germany announced resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare to stop the increasing flow of American supplies to Britain and France. Four days later German ambassador, Von Bernstorff, was handed his papers to go home. On February 26th Wilson asked Congress for a resolution of armed neutrality to arm American merchant vessels. While opposing senators filibustered, the first American ships were sunk, and the Zimmerman note in which Germany offered Mexico a military alliance for war on the United States was published by Lansing. Then on the evening of April 2, 1917, five months after Phil's morning reprieve from family worry in news of a peace policy Democrat administration retained in Washington, President Wilson delivered his war message to Congress.

Andy stayed at the Capitol all day. He felt he could not face Vivian's opposition to war. During early hours the city became charged with an atmosphere of excitement similar to that he remembered in the air of Topeka preceding the head-on clash of Republicans and Populists long ago. Twice pacifist organizations gathered to demonstrate on the Capitol grounds and were dispersed by troops of the Second Cavalry. Then a breathless calm of anticipation gained upper hand; and in Andy it grew

into rousing, heady exhilaration as evening approached and he became assured of no violence to mar the President's greatest day. He went early to hear the war message to make certain of a front row seat in the gallery. Armed cavalymen guarded approaches to the building. Andy presented his certified pass to a trooper.

Inside and leaning over the railing Andy could see the Supreme Court Justices already directly beneath him. Even without gowns their dignified demeanors and separate row of seats set them apart from other government officials and foreign emissaries.

Andy looked down upon the main floor, and passed time by identifying persons he knew until unintelligible instructions from the presiding officer caught his attention. The buzz of conversation faded throughout the hall with the flurry of activity among guards before doorways. The occupant of the seat beside Andy hunched sharply forward far out over the railing and set off a wave of similar movement on both sides all along the row. The same thing happens to a string of up-ended dominoes when one happens to fall.

"The President—" That breathless whisper was caught up and spread. Necks craned and stretched for the first glimpse.

There was slight confusion at the main double doors which parted partially. Then slowly, majestically the portals opened wide. Vice President Marshall came through, leading the march of Senators. Momentarily spectators relaxed, disappointed in eagerness to cheer. Then they cheered anyway. The Senators stepped in cadence, and each carried a flag at a precise, forty-five degree angle over his right shoulder. As they reached their places each stood his flag upright in a floor socket beside his chair. Even after they were seated bursts of hurrahs pursued each other in waves before the audience subsided to individual interests.

"Have you noticed the cut of Mrs. Denver's gown?"

"Oh dear, yes. A little too revealing, wouldn't you say?"

Andy relaxed resigned to a long wait. He glanced with secondary interest to the lady criticized. She typified the latest in Washington fashions—Paris designs which tightly draped the hips and swept snugly downward to the ankles in high-buttoned shoes. All dresses were daringly brief at the tops. Bobbed hair had been in style less than six months, yet Andy could not find even one head topped with a coil. He reflected that Vivian braided Norma Lee's and still wore her own in a flat bun behind her neck and wondered how long either would withstand the trend.

"The President of the United States!"

Speaker Clark's ringing announcement had come so soon after the

seating of Senators as to catch the crowd off guard; but the Justices forewarned had risen to lead an ovation. Amid startled utterances the galleries creaked with the trample of masses coming to their feet. Cheering broke when Wilson was half way to his station. Shivers ran over Andy as he stopped and bowed. Peel upon peel rolled through the great hall as he passed on, and the volume still swelled after he had taken position behind the green-topped table. He raised his right hand for silence just as the congressmen from both houses joined in yelling and stamping. Wilson returned his arm to his side. Standing slender and erect he weaved a little and presently placed his paper and both hands on the table and leaned forward waiting.

He's worn out, Andy thought. Can't they see that? Can't they show the courtesy to let him speak! For an interval long and maddening to Andy the uproar continued, but once it had subsided enough that Wilson began, all noise dwindled out.

The President read steadily and carefully, grave but positive, his manuscript held firmly between his hands. There was no gesturing, no striding—nothing to take attention from the words uttered. As the speech progressed an inner voice rose to take control. Andy could not hear all nor could he have recorded the precise content if he had heard. The voice was too rich and vibratory with conviction. By the time Wilson came to the question of passivity toward German atrocities, Andy was leaning forward and breathing lightly, caught like the whole audience in the oratorical phenomenon of circular response.

"There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making." To the farthest recesses of the silent hall the words fell like hammers. "We shall *not* choose the path of submission—"

Chief Justice White let fall his spotless white hat to lurch upward to his feet. With childlike beatitude on his face he groped at the heavens high and wide with both hands and brought them together with a crack. House, Senate and galleries roared out hurrahs.

After a moment Wilson sought to proceed, but with an example set for interruptions, applause broke out on each few sentences, and grew so unruly near the end that the President halted and laying down his paper held forth both arms in pleading appeal for silence to finish. In the ensuing stillness the sack-cloth of earthly reserve which he had ever kept drawn about him in public life now fell entirely away. He was no longer a man, nor of the earth. The soul of a great teacher had come forth to stand naked and unashamed.

"It is a fearful thing to lead this great, peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars; civilization itself seems to be

in balance. But the right is more precious than peace and we shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts, for democracy, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for the universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations, and make the world itself at last free.

"To such a task we dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and the blessings and the peace which she has treasured. God—helping—her—" His voice broke. "God helping her—she—can—do—no other."

The President stepped backward with hands dropping slowly to his sides. At first there was not a sound. Then a cheering began, a timorous, hesitant applause which grew to a solid din, forcing Wilson to bow and bow when he would have retired. Legislators waved their flags, threw hats aloft, and yelled with Justices and foreign representatives.

Wilson withdrew first, followed by the Justices, hurrahing as they went, and then the diplomats in order of respective levels.

The crowd wedged Andy against the railing. He took hold of it with both hands to retain position while people passed. From exhaustion their noise was subsiding.

"Isn't that disgraceful! Who are they?"

The voice was a woman's and Andy looked at her. She was matronly with jaw stern in anger, and he followed her gaze down to the main floor. The scene below was breaking up. Behind the jostle and bustle of departing legislators stood the dominant figure of LaFollette of Wisconsin, cynical and composed, his arms folded high and hard across his chest. His jaw worked vigorously on a wad of gum as he looked about him. Senator Stone of Missouri was beside him, as though the two might represent a team. Near them stood a third more youthful man. He was absolutely motionless, and Andy's attention fixed on his familiar face. Young George Norris, who gave allegiance to no political party, presented at that moment a stark study in conflicting emotions. Weariness, bewilderment, and disillusion—each seemed to be struggling separately for mastery of him, but there was no cynicism. And at that moment a fellow senator planted himself squarely before the Nebraskan.

"You're right and we're all wrong, I suppose," he shouted. "You're so damned smart you know more than ninety men!"

Norris faced the challenge and in so doing also faced Andy. He spoke mildly, almost charitably; yet his answer penetrated distance and carried

a ring. "You will regret your actions in calmer moments. You have placed the dollar sign on the American flag."

"I shall demand retraction of your remark on the Senate floor!"

"Demand what you please."

Andy stiffened and turned from the encounter. Norris was another Nebraskan. The West was always rearing revolvers. Momentarily Andy despised his home region. Could this be Bryan's work—influencing the young senator out of resentment from dismissal? Then immediately Andy knew with twinge of conscience that to think the question was unjust. Bryan had never taken issue with individuals behind their backs, and George Norris was known for a mind of his own. Any collaboration offer tainted with deception he would spurn instantly from anyone. No, they were only shortsighted men, too small for Wilson's stature. Within their narrower minds they were honest men. They had fought for much that was good—and it was the more loss to the nation that they could not be truly great.

In a trampling stream of people, Andy left the gallery, remembering Bryan's remark as he took a last look about the Cabinet office he was leaving. "My bird has been plucked of its plumes. Income taxes, trust control legislation, public works programs, prohibition at hand—one party or the other has picked them all. After the war, I wouldn't be of much use around here longer anyway."

Outside the Capitol the grounds and avenues were crammed. Men and women waved remnants of hats and handkerchiefs, shouting in voices grown hoarse. Whistles were blowing, bells ringing. Hundreds of automobiles, stalled by pedestrians, added to the noise with horns.

Andy merged with the crowd, thrilling with it and with no destination in mind. All he could think of was the encouragement such a spectacle of national support must be to the President. If I could even shake hands with him once and say how much I am with him. But I can't ask such a favor of Lansing. The President has too many people he must see, too much to plan—

After a while in the jostle Andy was pressed against a building. He halted, grateful for a pause with protection of a stone wall at his back. Out of the stored up mob energy awakening around him, he saw street clothes become uniforms, and the tents and barracks of drillfields that would spring up over the nation in numbers to make his training with the Rough Riders a side show. He saw sweating columns marching, and the resentment and strain in faces of recruits suffering their basic discipline. He saw lonely soldiers, and irresponsible rollicking soldiers on passes. All that he saw again and transformed to scale of thousands instead

of hundreds. And he felt the feeling of unknown destinations in troop trains pulling off into the night. The hitherto great, romantic adventure of his past existence, the Spanish War, paled before this new threshold prospect. On the civilian side lines of war, life passed men by. He had not allowed it to pass him in 1898, and now knew surely he would go again. And he knew, remembering Phil's words, that he was not deciding from intelligence nor motive to advance the great dream of President Wilson. This urge stirring him was too deep for individual human choice. It stemmed from mysterious sources beyond him as Andy York, far back into that ageless music of the universe out of which both men and worlds are born.

I will join the navy, he thought, and that, too, was a predetermined decision, born unrecognized from his wound at San Juan, its fearful pain, and memory of the hospital in which he had nearly lost first his life and then his leg—and of Sampson's battleships separated by blue waves from muddy tents and entrenchments to be assaulted. On the water you have a better chance of coming back whole to your family or not at all.

The crowd had spread enough from Capitol Hill toward downtown to make walking possible, and Andy headed for his office. He felt it imperative to take action at once to release himself from the State Department. As he climbed the stairs there occurred to him a fleeting, unpleasant thought that he might be of more service to his country in the army where he had had some experience. "Nonsense," he muttered, telling himself what he wanted to hear. "It's not much one remembers about drilling after twenty years, and as Phil said they don't use cavalry anymore. The navy has to get them across."

In his office he called the night secretary and began dictating his letter to Lansing. "This resignation is to take effect immediately as I am joining the navy for duration of war— No, that isn't the way to say it. My resignation is to be effective at once for reason of— Oh hang!" He snapped his fingers violently. "That was no good either." He threw up his hands to the bewildered young woman. "You do it," he commanded. "My mind is all up in the air. Tell 'em I want to resign right away to enlist in the navy."

Andy walked to the window and stood sidewise to the casement looking down, hands locked behind him. Strange how this has me so dazed, he thought, when I knew for weeks it was coming and told Phil months ago I might enlist.

As background for his conscious thinking there was the undiminished cheering in the streets though muffled by walls and windows. In semi-conscious surmise from his gaze through the panes he saw that more

police had arrived and were trying to clear a way for vehicular traffic. Andy heard the noise with his ears, watched in glances the nimble fingers of the typist, thought again of Wilson with his lofty purpose, and felt the terrible loneliness and sadness that would soon come to Vivian from whom he would be parted for the first time since marriage. She would smile a strained, brave smile and tell him she understood, that she knew he had done what he felt he must do. For her it would have been easier if he had waited and applied for a commission. But within his heart he could not endure thought of acting the part of an officer, aloof and superior to the American populace which he loved and of which he had always felt himself a living part. Perhaps Vivian would understand that also. Often she understood his acts more clearly than he himself did. At any rate she would be well supported from his service pay, and his Spanish-American War pension.

Andy stopped thinking and stared down at the police, still unable to cope with the crowd.

There crept through and over him a queer sensation of unreality, as if he were being drifted apart from the core of things into another world. His ears no longer kept pace with the clicking of the typewriter nor the hosannas of the throng. The scene seemed to have assumed aspects of slow motion through which people hurried pell mell unconscious of their speed.

Suddenly Andy became aware the secretary had spoken. "Is that satisfactory, Mr. York?"

He looked at her. "Uh—yes." He started, reddening. "Would you mind reading it again, please?" Andy heard her through. "That will do nicely," he told her. He crossed to the desk, picked up a pen and signed the sheet. "Have it delivered first thing in the morning." Then he took his hat and walked methodically toward the door. There yet remained, squarely confronting him now, that most difficult task of all—taking word of his resignation home to Vivian and Norma Lee.

Chapter 40

On the same day Andy listened to Wilson's war message, Electra ended her eighth month of pregnancy and felt her first pre-labor contractions.

Irene Barker met MacGregor at the door and whispered the information. "She had only a few mild pains and a little nausea, but it was definite."

MacGregor left hat and spring wraps on a chair and went on into

Electra's bedroom. She was sitting up with a shawl about her shoulders, deep in the big, soft chair Hal had bought special for her. "Mother Barker has been tattling on you," he told her cheerfully. He sat down beside her at once with his satchel and began wrapping her arm to test blood pressure. "She says you have been a restless girl today." He watched her face without appearing to and saw the sudden little fear that shot into her eyes though she smiled back.

"I ate something that didn't quite agree with me, early nettle greens Hal found on the sunny side of the creek."

"Uh huh?"

"She has no temperature at all," Mrs. Barker said. "I've been taking it regular."

Electra gave her mother-in-law a grateful glance. "I guess I just ate too much supper," she added quickly.

The physician's bald head nodded of hearing them while he pumped and read the baumanometer gauge. He finished and freed her arm. "You'll have to be lying down, now," he said. "Come, I'll help you."

Electra lay very still on the bed, backed against the pillows he had propped for her and minute by minute growing more frightened because he was taking longer than usual. Her mother-in-law waited silent at her head. At length MacGregor straightened and smiled at her.

"Well, my dear, it's time you went to the hospital. That baby is getting too husky for you."

"Right now—today?"

"Yes."

Electra began to shake. She felt Mother Barker's hand slide over her nearest one and gripped back tightly. Her other hand flew to her mouth with spread fingers pressing into her trembling lips. "Tomorrow, let's wait till tomorrow."

MacGregor shook his head.

"A day, let me wait a day. Just one day!"

"No." MacGregor looked at Mrs. Barker. "Has she eaten breakfast?"

"A little fruit juice and coffee, but nothing at noon."

"Good. She must not have anything more." MacGregor sat down on the edge of the bed beside Electra. He put his hand on her yellow hair. "Here's a piece of good news for you. I've been consulting with Dr. Bade on your X-ray pictures, and we don't think you'll have to go to any sanatorium after you leave the hospital. But we mustn't waste time about your operation."

"Only for one day, till I can talk to Hal," she repeated.

"You can still talk to him beforehand, and he can be right beside you

in surgery if you like. You would only lie here tonight and wear yourself out worrying. The nurses will prepare you right off, and when the evening is over it will all be done. Wouldn't you like to have it taken care of and be getting well?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly.

"Of course you would. Mrs. Barker can telephone your husband, and I'll have an ambulance sent and make arrangements for you at the hospital." He turned to Mrs. Barker. "You had better call right away."

Hal stopped by for Phil and drove on to town as fast as his car would run. Maggie had refused to accompany them. "I'd break down if I talked to her," she said.

The ambulance had gone when Hal reached his mother's and the men followed in haste to the hospital. There Electra was already in her room being dressed by a Sister and a young little student nurse. Electra cried out when she saw them in the doorway. Hal rushed to her and kissed her, and her fingers turned white against his tan as she clutched him around the neck. Phil, watching them, felt in a surge of fear and pain the desperate strength of her mother embracing him at Weichsel station and her locked fingers he had forcibly opened to make his train.

"You will stay right with me through the operation?" pleaded Electra. "You won't leave me even for a second!"

"I'll be right there," said Hal.

The Sister came over, released Electra's hold, and replaced her hands at her sides under the sheet. "You must not excite yourself. You must let the hypo relax you."

Electra looked to Phil. "You'll be there too, Father?"

"I'd only be in the way," he said gently.

"Maybe it would be the last minutes you could have with me."

Phil swallowed. In the blue eyes beseeching him, eyes big and dark and more than ever before like her mother's in her pallor of fear, Electra brought back his belated understanding that her mother was not one for plains hardships. In that moment it became a foregone conclusion with him that his daughter would die also. Yet he heard himself say: "Don't talk like that! You'll pull through."

"But I want you to be with me. Please."

Phil put his hands behind him where she could not see them knot into fists. Maggie, too, had nearly died when Bob was born. The so-called blessing of children was a curse laid on love and happiness. "I'd only be in the way," he said again.

Two new nurses came swift and business-like, and the Sister motioned the men to leave.

Outside Phil stopped a moment with Hal. "I don't think I could stand it here," he said. He could not tell him his thoughts; but looking into his son-in-law's pale, strained face he remembered his own need of Andy long ago and knew he should not leave. "I'll be waiting in the car to go home with you."

Phil strode off with hands still clinched—and Hal stood alone in the hall, staring at the door to the room they had left, numbness seeping through him. He could hear voices. What were they doing in there?

The little student nurse came out but closed the door again behind her. She touched his arm. "I'll take you to surgery," she said. She walked at his side down the corridor and turned him toward a wide stairway. Brisk-stepping young men all in white jackets overtook and passed them going up. They were talking enthusiastically, and Hal heard the words: "Delivery. Caesarean section." He felt his feet stumbling a little on the top steps. He looked down and saw his knees trembling.

They went a few yards down another corridor, and the girl opened a door for him. There were two sets of doors to pass through, and beyond the second Hal stood within a strange world—a tight little world of white ceiling and white walls and white floor and white furniture. Beings moved in it, busy and awesome, clothed also in whiteness of their own. Dr. Bade, before a shining sink where tappets gushed full force, alone broke the pattern; but a nearby nurse stood ready with a gown held open to absorb him. Hal glanced at himself and the grotesque contrast of his dark suit. Then the little student nurse flitted back from a cabinet with still another gown and put him inside of it. She propelled him through another door. Centered in the new room was a thinly padded table, tight sheeted. Narrow, heartless, snow-white, it stood ready—waiting for the patient.

"Do not touch anything," said the student nurse.

MacGregor was there, making ready to administer anesthetic. Hal watched him a moment but MacGregor appeared not to see him. Others entered or went out, crossed and recrossed the room. The interns seen on the stairs appeared on a little, glassed-in balcony overhead.

Something was wheeled in, a form covered save for a face pale around wide, stricken, blue eyes. Hal heard Electra's voice calling him. He started toward her, was intercepted and pushed aside by one of the interns who had brought her in. He saw her swiftly and neatly transferred to the table.

Just then a voice spoke loudly through all the silent movements: "Fasten that."

Hal looked around and saw Dr. Bade now also in the room. He was

standing slightly bent over, arms extended in front of him, his gown gaping open at the back of the neck where a fastener had not been properly secured. Hal stepped dutifully toward him, putting out a shaking hand; but the surgeon sprang almost violently aside.

"Not you!"

The little nurse came scuttling back to Hal as an elderly nurse stepped quickly before him. She turned belligerently upon the girl. "Don't you dare leave him again! Do you hear?"

The girl shrank. "Yes, Sister." After the other left them she whispered up to Hal, "You would have contaminated the doctor's gown." A moment later at a nod from MacGregor she led him a little nearer Electra's side, and there she remained on guard of him, never once releasing his arm.

A stand was pushed near to the table. White-clad men and women slipped to and fro bringing things, strapping Electra's limbs. One of the nurses smeared something greasy over Electra's face. When she stepped back, MacGregor took her spot. Electra rolled her face aside from the ether mask in his hand, and MacGregor paused with it poised above. He smiled down into her wild eyes.

"You will find this easy to take if you don't fight it."

"Save my baby," Electra begged.

Hal heard her say the words and repeat them, but his eyes were held magnetized to the snowy gown where it quivered over her bosom to the violent beating of her heart.

"You'll be all right, Mrs. Barker," said the nurse at her head.

The mask went into place. "Now, take a long, slow breath."

Electra gagged and struggled. She fought to free her hands.

"A long, slow breath," MacGregor's voice repeated encouragingly.

Hal watched Electra hold her breath until her lungs could no longer obey her will. From depths of the mask as she began to inhale the words came up again, broken but beseeching: "Save my—baby. Save—my—ba—abe—e." Her voice trailed off. Her body shivered and she relaxed. There came a snap and a flood of white light down upon the table. Electra's breathing grew slow and loud. The nurses became busy, cleansing the incisional area.

Dr. Bade approached and stood watching everything, his empty, gloved hands still extended before him. Presently he turned his eyes to MacGregor and then down. Hal followed his gaze to the spot upon which it centered. He saw the iodine stain come off under the alcohol. Naked, milk-white flesh was revealed, surrounded by towels. A dizziness began to steal over him.

Dr. Bade bent lower. His face was puckered to a furious scowl. Already his forehead was moist with forming perspiration, and a nurse moved into place behind him with a towel wrapped about her hands, ready to wipe him dry.

"Scalpel."

A little blade with a gleam like silver as the light struck it appeared in his hand. Hal saw it drawn swiftly and truly. The flesh opened pale yellow in its wake and was at once threaded by tiny rivulets of starting blood. The instrument vanished. Another replaced it and also disappeared, too marvelously accurate for Hal to follow or to comprehend. Then Bade's hands were inside the wound, fingers working, parting muscle fibers—carefully yet forcefully tearing the flesh. Hal shut his eyes for a moment against the terrible fascination of the sight. He opened them again as Bade flung his head momentarily backward.

"Wipe." A toweled hand shot across his face and it bent down again.

"Clamp."

A voice was counting. Otherwise there were only the clipped words of the surgeon through a hot, moist silence and Electra's harsh, monotonous breathing. No questions, no answers to guide Hal, only the quick, dexterous movements. An extra hand appeared now and again unasked for under Bade's arms where a severed vessel flowed freely.

The sweet, heavy smell of the anesthetic clogged Hal's nostrils. The room began turning for him, first slowly and smoothly, then faster with increasing instability until walls and faces rose and fell as the scene spun. The surgeon's fingers seemed to be doing a dance and the white light growing dim. Hal became aware that the girl nurse was tugging on his elbow.

"Come with me. *Quickly!*"

Someone caught his other arm, steadying him, and between them he made it through a doorway with the casements rocking past.

When Hal's vision and senses cleared, he found himself in the corridor outside, backed up halfway sitting against the ledge of an open window supported between a black-robed Sister and his little nurse. They were vigorously manipulating his arms and bending his body. They ceased as soon as he remonstrated.

"If you will step out-of-doors for a few deep breaths you will feel better," the Sister said.

Hal shook his head. He felt rather nauseated, but he straightened himself. "I told her I wouldn't leave her."

"Well, you can't go back in there."

"No. No, I guess I'd better wait here."

“Take him to the visitors’ lounge,” the Sister told the nurse.

“No,” Hal said again. “I might miss her when she came out. How is she standing it?”

The Sister looked up into his gray face. “You will know in a few minutes.” Then her expression gentled and the crispness left her voice. “I will bring a chair here for you.” When she returned Hal sat down gratefully, and the Sister went away. The girl remained with him.

Hal had never seen a patient taken from an operating room. When the door finally opened for the cart, the still form covered head to foot in white made him think of a corpse. He gave a wordless cry and sprang up, but again he was held from rushing forward.

“Wait for your doctor, please,” the girl told him. The elevator door slid shut behind the cart and robed attendants.

Then came the trample of interns heading for the stairs. “Twenty-two minutes on the table! Boy, that’s speed!”

Hal closed his eyes tightly against sight of them. When he looked again at sound of other footsteps, Dr. Bade was passing, blood-smeared of front and sleeves. Hal could scarcely recognize him. The surgeon’s face was paste color and streaming; about his shoulders sweat had soaked his gown. He paused only an instant when accosted.

“Your wife and baby have survived the operation. I predict complete surgical recovery. No, you can’t see her, not today.”

Dr. MacGregor had washed and dressed when he came. His seamed face showed strain, but it beamed. He went straight to Hal and shook his hand. “Don’t worry about her. She came through well, and you have a fine son. Come, I’ll take you to see him in the incubator.”

Electra’s all right and I have a boy, thought Hal. That was his first conscious thought, but in spite of its fearful relieving truth it did not seem real. Neither did the tiny red face inside the cotton-lined box with window lid, nor the smiling nurse who exhibited it, nor the likewise still smiling MacGregor.

Alone in the lounge afterwards to convince himself Hal pronounced slowly aloud his baby’s name taken from grandfather and great-grandfather. “John Feldtmann Barker.” Grandparents brought recollection of Phil still in suspense. Hal seized his hat and coat and started for the door. It was as he opened it that he first became aware of newsboys’ clamor about town, distant voices shrill and unintelligible and one approaching the hospital. “Uxtra-a. President Wilson delivers war message! Uxtra-a.”

An elderly Sister with exasperation on her face swept past Hal and ordered the boy away. “You young dunce—disturbing our patients!”

It isn’t true, Hal told himself. It’s another hoax put out to sell papers.

He had not read a headline for days in worry over Electra, and there was no room in his heart now for the thought he might be taken from her. Down the sidewalk he saw Phil, hurrying to him, and in sudden full realization that Electra had been given back to them tears burst from Hal's eyes. With them running down his cheeks he ran to meet Phil calling: "She'll live! She'll live!"

Part VI — “If You Can’t Fight, Farm!”

Chapter 41

After America declared war the price of grain, already high, skyrocketed on government promise of price supports. Weeks before Kansas wheat was ripe for cutting, reports came from Texas of a shortage of harvest hands. The usual influx of field laborers had turned eastward to the higher wages of factories expanding on war contracts.

Anticipating the problem, Joel Palmer, who was renting one of his father's farms, persuaded Archibald to give up the old, tedious custom of stacking wheat for the faster system of threshing from the shock, and both asked to join Mike Kelly's threshing run.

"I'd like to take you," Kelly told them, "but I already have seven jobs. That'll take six weeks as heavy as wheat is this year, and I don't know as I ought to ask folks I've threshed for regular to hold off longer on ploughing. You come to my place when we meet to plan the season and we'll see what they say."

When they arrived Jim York, Henri Loubet, Bruno Haeckel, and Clarence and Shannon had already gathered. Shannon still farmed Phil's home place through summer vacations. With them also was Bob, whom Kelly had hired to run the threshing machine steam engine. Bob was already wearing striped engineer's coveralls he had bought for his job, a contrast to suspender overalls and blue shirts of the others; and he announced himself promptly on the Palmers' request. "We all know how much our wheat means to the war. Let's all pitch in and help Granddad and Joe get theirs right off to the elevator."

Henri Loubet threw up his hand in approval. He spoke loudly for Bruno Haeckel's benefit. "Whipping the Germans comes first!"

Jim York raised the other side of the question. "It'll take longer. I'm for helping the war, but some of us will have boys called into the army before long and be left with more than we can do. If we get behind and

have to plant late this fall, we may lose the country more wheat in the long run than we save this summer."

Clarence nodded. "Help's going to be scarce." Haeckel said nothing.

"Me and Joel will mean two more crew men you can depend on," Arch said.

"We'd sure like to come in if you'll let us," Joel persisted.

Kelly looked from one to another of his regular customers and at Shannon last.

"I've already hired Chet Freeman for my threshing hand, and I won't be here to put in another crop so I haven't much at stake—but I'm for taking them in," Shannon said.

Jim hesitated. "I won't be one to block it. I guess it's mostly up to Mike anyway. He owns the machine."

"That ain't the way I do business," Kelly said. "My regular customers come first. But I been thinking. Jeremy Hendricks has asked me to come in too. If I could have all three, I'd buy a new rig with a big forty-inch separator. We could thresh faster and all finish sooner."

Bob's eyes popped open. "A forty-incher!"

Kelly grinned. "Think you can keep up steam to pull her, son?"

"You're damned right!"

Everybody laughed at Bob's man-like profanity.

"It'll call for a bigger crew, because I'll have to run pitchers in the field and a spike pitcher at the feeder," Kelly went on. "You'll have to take chances with me on finding extra men."

"We will. There's sure to be enough around someplace."

Jim smiled again with the rest, but not with Bob's complete assurance. "It's worth risking," he said.

Joel went to town early Saturday night to hire a man for himself ahead of neighbors though it was a week before he could start binding. He went at once to the busy corner where Democrat John Freeman ran a popcorn wagon. Though feeble now and a widower, John had not lost interest in the political scene or local problems and kept a harvest season notebook, a kind of free register for floaters looking for jobs.

"Any hands in yet, John?"

The old man ate continually. He helped himself from his fresh roasted peanuts and looked at Joel with ageing, watery eyes. "There's men loafing at the railroad yards, but I don't know if any want work. At least they ain't signed with me. They been riding freights in and camping on the right-of-way. The sheriff ought to move them on."

"Leave them stay; we can use them. This county'll need three hundred, mebbe five."

John had been cracking hulls steadily and shoveled a handful of kernels into his mouth. "Ever hear of the IWW's, Joe?"

"Yeah. Some new labor movement or other."

"My nephew in Oklahoma says it means just plain: I Won't Work. Farmers down that way have been running them out with shotguns. These WW's don't take kindly to goin' to war."

Two little girls came up presenting nickels, and salesman John gave attention to his customers.

Joel sauntered away, but he did not get far alone. A young man lounging near to the conversation overtook him. "Beg pawdon," he said, as he came along side. "You look like a farmer and I'm needin' work. Maybe you could tell me of a neighbor wanting help?" He introduced himself as Slim Higgins.

Joel stopped and looked him over, making note of the Southern drawl. The stranger was slender, blond, and in his twenties. He was in ragged shirt and overalls with a nail for the connecting link of a missing suspender button, and he was bareheaded; but his face was shaven clean. There were strong, wiry muscles in his thin arms.

"Where you from?"

"Down in Lou-siana. I aim to follow the harvest to the Dakotas."

"Can you handle horses?"

"We drive mules down South. I reckon there ain't much difference."

"Not much," Joel said. "I could use a good shocker myself, but my wheat won't be ready to bind for a few days. I could give you weed cutting for your meals till then. How much wages you asking?"

"I've heard six dollars a day."

Joel deliberated. He knew the neighborhood talk was of six, but if he could hire the first man for less it might set a pattern. "I calculate five dollars and board will be the level in this locality."

"I'll take it if you got a long job. A man can't make no money movin' on every few days."

"We got the longest run in this territory, a solid two months."

"That'll be a lot of dollars," Slim said. He glanced at himself and passed a hand along his frayed pants legs. "I don't like to ask early favors, boss, but I'll have to have overalls, hat and gloves."

"Ain't you got no money at all?"

"Busted flat." Slim spread his bare palms upward before him. "You can take back for them out of my pay."

Joel hesitated fractionally, but there was the thought of five dollar

wages and then a picture of his wheat bundles scattered and sprouting in the fields if the summer rains kept on. "Come to the drygoods store. I'll fix you out and show you where our car is parked. We'll be startin' home around half past nine."

Plainsboro's business section was fast filling with people when Joel separated from Slim Higgins. Atop the lamp posts, globes shone yellow surrounded by swarms of insects. Busy clerks carried cases of eggs and crocks of butter from cars and spring wagons or filled grocery orders at counters. Teams appeared and disappeared, driven to livery stables after unloading. Earliest arrivals with autos had already captured the center parking stalls on Main Street, that the women folks might have a place to sit later in the evening to watch the crowd go by. Most of the cars were still empty with the women going from store to store to do trading, their small children dawdling along behind.

After a trip to the hardware Joel was free. His wife made all family purchases. He had sent the oldest of his children to the movie and left the rest with her. Joel was happy with himself for hiring a hand at reduced wages. He bought a cigar and strolled, smoking with relish and calling greetings to neighbors who passed. Groups of noisy youngsters brushed him as they trotted up one side of the street and down the other, licking all-day suckers and crunching popcorn. Sometimes they confronted parents for another dime. Older youths of high school age also paraded in their own sets until they met with troupes of special girls. There were bashfully presented questions to start conversation, with the girls giggling, swinging their handbags and kicking daintily at the curbstones with pointed-toed button shoes. Joel recognized some of them later in couples at soda fountains. Kids spent a lot of money in town nowadays, he reflected, because of this fad for sending them to high school. That was where they learned to run the streets and fill the drugstores. Boys didn't need book learning to farm and girls even less.

The men clustered on corners to argue crops, the war, and prices and wages. "By another year our boys will be drafted right out of our fields where they are most needed unless farmers are exempted. God knows what the labor shortage will do to us. Six dollars a day is damned thievery!"

Joel joined one group after another long enough to pass word along he had hired a man for five. "There's no need going higher," he always added. "My hand was glad to get the job. This labor shortage ain't so bad as pictured."

Joel was looking principally for Kelly and found him with Loubet, Hendricks and Clarence Garwood—all sitting upon the bank steps. Kelly

announced at once the shipping papers on his new separator. "It'll get here any day now, in plenty of time to tune her up. It's a J. I. Case, and man will those new machines eat the straw!"

Shannon came up as Joel repeated his advice on wages. "What will we do if we can't find enough men for less than six dollars?" he asked.

"Anybody who honestly wants to work will do it for five, and if he's too lazy to work he's no good anyway," Joel said.

Loubet and Hendricks nodded, and Clarence looked approval.

"If counties around you pay more, the workers will go there."

"They won't pay more if we get the standard set first," Loubet said. "Five is enough raise over the four we paid last year."

Shannon thought of the price of wheat which had doubled, but he withheld mentioning that. This Plainsboro street corner was much further removed from history classrooms and Dr. Schleicher's chemistry laboratory than the miles by train. In blue overalls and open-collared work shirt Shannon did not resemble a college man, but he knew he was now looked upon as a book farmer by these folks, and he did not wish to argue with them. "Labor is better organized than last year," he said, and dropped the issue.

It was nearer twelve than half past nine with stores closing and streets becoming empty by the time Joel Palmer brought his family together before the car, and Slim came over from steps across the sidewalk where he had sat the last hour dozing.

"This is the hand I hired," Joel said by way of introduction to his wife.

"Happy to know you, Ma'am," said Slim.

Nelly Palmer appraised him as a boarder. "How do you do."

Slim was crowded into the back seat of a touring Model T with top down, together with four sticky-faced children and an empty egg case upended for space. The youngsters stared at him sleepily.

Joel went around front to the crank and stopped, looking over the car. "Where's Mabel?"

"She told Jimmy that Harold would take her home," Nelly said.

"Are you sure? We don't want to go off and leave her."

The oldest of three little boys opened his eyes a moment. "'Course I'm sure. They was going to a late pitcher show and stopped on purpose to tell me. Harold has a brand new buggy to drive her in!"

"She ought to have told you or me," Joel said to his wife. "Jim might have gone to sleep or forgotten and we'd have been waiting and looking all over town. She's too young to gad about with boys anyway!" He gave the engine a sharp spin and it caught spark.

Mrs. Palmer had gotten settled in the front seat in spite of a bulging

sack of groceries and arranged the baby on her lap. "Now, Pa, Mabel's near sixteen."

Joel climbed over the side of the car and under the steering wheel. "She's still too young." He reached across his wife's knees and viciously slammed the door she had failed to latch. "First thing you know she'll be ketching a steady feller."

They backed out of the stall and rattled off down the street.

Out on the country road the Ford did its best to stir up a breeze, and Joel folded down the windshield to help. In the back seat the youngsters were asleep, their chocolate-smearred faces catching dust. Under obligation to sociability Joel tried asking a few questions of Slim. They were answered in monosyllables. Ripening wheatfields slipped past, made flat and white by the moonlight. It lent to the unchanging face of the stranger a pale and desolate cast.

At last the car turned onto a side road and after a mile of bumping progress turned again into a farmyard and halted before the car shed. Slim gazed about at the vague collection of ramshackle buildings—house, chicken coop, and barn with pasture corral and adjacent to that a sty where pigs grunted.

"The tank's low," Joel announced upon alighting and went to turn on the windmill. He dragged several times on the brake wire to turn it into the breeze. The wheel screeched and groaned through a half revolution.

Nelly Palmer meanwhile got herself out of the car and with the baby on one arm dug and pommeled sleeping children in the back seat with her free hand. "Jimmy, Orville, Ernest, Martha—wake up. We're home."

The response was an unhappy mumble from sleep-drugged senses.

Slim, also out of the car now, stood and watched her.

"We're home," she repeated, shaking the nearest lad violently. Orville was dragged from the car last and as she released him to take up the groceries he promptly slumped down upon the running board. "Come, come, Ordy. You can't sleep here." Exasperated at his failure to be stirred by voice, she set down the grocery sack and brought the boy to his feet by the collar. "Get to bed!" She started him off with a cuff. Orville moved away in the general direction of the house like one in a coma, fell over a chicken box and began to bawl.

Slim picked up the bag of groceries and followed Mrs. Palmer as she waltzed the limping youngster toward the house by the arm.

"I barked my shins," he blubbered.

"Well, look where you're going! There's a loose step," she told Slim at the porch. "Joe never gets around to nailing it down."

Inside, Orville was left to stand snivelling in the middle of the floor

while she lighted a kerosene lamp with one hand and carried the baby off to the bedroom. The kitchen table was piled with unwashed supper dishes, and Slim set the groceries on a chair. Jimmy, Ernest, and their sister had already disappeared.

"You'll have to excuse the looks of the house," Mrs. Palmer said when she came back. "We left in such a hurry I couldn't do up the work."

Joel came in behind them. "I can't make that damned mill run. If the wind don't blow tomorrow, we'll have to pump water for the stock." He turned to Orville. "What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, he fell down," Mrs. Palmer said.

Orville wailed out suddenly. "I hurt my shins, I did."

"You're always hurting yourself. Go on to bed. It'll be well in the morning," Joel told him. "We always get back way after mid-night when the kids are asleep," he went on. "If we can't get home earlier from now on, we ain't going."

Nelly Palmer paid absolutely no attention to his words. She turned to Slim, waiting silently beside the window. "Let's see. You can find room in bed upstairs with the boys."

Joel hastened back to forgotten duties of host. "Yes, sure. I'll show you the way. There's another lamp around here someplace."

Slim glanced at the candy-coated face and hands of Orville, finally shuffling off. "It's mighty hot. With blankets I'd sleep better outside."

"Well now, you're sure welcome to a bed," Joel told him, "but I'll agree it is hot."

Nelly hurried to supply blankets, generously adding a pillow.

Slim tried the warm water in the bucket at the sink as he went out, and later they heard him at the well, pumping a fresh drink. He stayed on over Sunday, ate the three meals provided. Monday morning when Joel went to call him for breakfast and to begin cutting weeds Slim was gone. So were the blankets and new clothes purchased. The pillow remained. Too bulky or useless, he had left it propped at the base of the spreading elm under which he had slept.

Chapter 42

For endless miles wheat stood and waved—waist tall. Great areas of submarginal plains land had been turned into fields, excellent grazing land plowed and ruined in the great gamble for quick riches in grain.

Drafting of peasants dwarfed Old World production. Failure of the British fleet at the Dardanelles to open way to Russian grain had further

thwarted supply and made food more important to Allied armies than munitions.

From Washington the Department of Agriculture sent pleas for cultivation of all nooks and corners. City dwellers were urged to spade lawns into gardens. The Hooverizing ration plan put flour substitutes on grocery shelves, for it was in wheat that needs were most desperate. On America's agricultural Midwest in 1917 rested responsibility for feeding half the world, and Kansas was the bread basket of that region.

To Plainsboro rain clouds had come regularly. All about, the crop ripened slowly and naturally, changing color by imperceptible degrees into beautiful yellow bronze of hearty maturity. Fat, reddish kernels swelled in the bearded Turkey heads until they split restraining hulls, and straws goose-necked under their weight. Wheat, thousands and thousands of acres of it. Millions of bushels to feed millions of men while they killed other millions! In summer breezes it rustled and stirred across fields in slow waves that were flowing tides of gold.

On the Garwood farm to little Phillip, soon to begin his second term in the country school, the grain at this stage held living beauty which set up within him imaginative wistfulness. Since before starting to read he had leafed through picture books absorbed, and listened in rapture while Shannon told fairytales into which he inserted Phillip as hero. Alone in play he created playmates; and the wheat, so inexplicably important to grown-ups that summer, aroused fancies for a most fearful game of make-believe. Wind swells were stirrings of huge warriors who lived in the fields. Now stalking, now hidden motionless and waiting, in bands they would all at once rush forward in a great sweep to seize and destroy an unseen prey. Eddies were agitations of terrible struggles. From talk overheard and cartoons of Germans, hacking and choking women and children, he named his monsters Huns. It sent crinkles up and down his back to imagine himself pursued and cornered, but always he defeated and killed the attackers at cost of painful wounds. He carved out a wooden dagger and sword for his battles, and made a slingshot with a rubber band so strong it sent pebbles whistling. Fully armed he slipped away often, leading his own band of scouts to explore the wheat jungle—in spite of his father's orders not to trample the grain. With Indian stealth he crept into the tallest, thickest patches and crouched, waiting with pounding heart for a crucial moment to fire volley after volley into an approaching wave and then charge sword and dagger in hand with his men upon wavering enemy.

Once binding began, presence of grown-ups with machines and horses destroyed Phillip's exciting private world. The family rose at dawn. Bob

and Shannon were in the field as soon as dew had disappeared from the grain, and Phil followed to help where needed after he and Maggie had done the chores. Rain showers came again and again to soak already moist earth, impeding progress; but in eagerness to save wheat for the war effort, Bob tried to keep cutting when neighbors' binders stood idle waiting for the mud to congeal. His heavy machine mired often. When the grain was still damp he loosened the canvases against shrinkage and strain on their rollers. As the fabric dried it stretched and slipped, and had to be repeatedly adjusted.

Little boys have harvest duties. Phillip's was the usual one of carrying water. Three times morning and afternoon he filled the burlap-covered jug fresh at the well and trudged about the field with it, walking in the bull wheel track after the binder, for straight stubble stung his bare feet. His legs though brown and toughened by wind and sun, became scratched to his knees from chasing young rabbits that hopped about bewildered when their concealment cover of standing wheat had been cut away. Sometimes Shannon left his shocking to join the race, and once Phil brought the rifle to the field and picked off a number of frying size.

Phillip loathed water carrying and whined over doing it, but other items in harvesting made it bearable and took the place of his war games. He found a half frightening fascination in the roar of whirling gears and sprockets when he followed close behind the binder; and in walking beside the wall of wheat he got a cross-sectional view of golden color at its richest. For Phillip it was a warm and generous color, and he could plod a whole length of the field just gazing. When Bob stopped to oil and asked him to help, then Phillip bustled in importance. Bob let him ride on the brace rods high up among the levers if their father was not in sight, a thrill forbidden by Phil from fear of Phillip falling into the machinery.

That year Bob did not drive round and round entire fields. He bound highest and driest areas first by strips and patches, hoping that before he finished those the rains would cease. The time came when nothing was left but ravines and flats, now muddier than ever, and it was little Phil, who helped him conquer the worst swale.

With water jug Phillip had overtaken the binder where it had bogged as usual on entering the down and tangled grain. Bob crawled from under the machine where he had dug the mud out of the bull wheel. He was red and perspiring and wiped his face with a greasy sleeve before hoisting the jug. It gurgled a long interval at his lips.

"I have a devil of a time getting through this spot," he said after his drink, "get stuck every thirty feet. Soon as the pulling gets heavy the

lead team slows up and that chokes the elevator. Hollering at 'em don't do no good; I've cussed myself hoarse. They've found out I can't reach them with the whip." He climbed back on the seat, gazing malignantly at the fat, switching sorrels hitched out in front. Suddenly his eyes turned to the slingshot hanging from Phillip's suspender. "You got rocks for that?"

Phillip brought out a handful of polished round ones from his hip pocket.

"Good! Give me your water jug." Bob hung it on a lever. "You follow beside them and when they start to slow down let 'em have it. Just a minute." He reached under the seat into the tool box and sorted out some rusty ball bearings. "These'll wake 'em up!"

Bob threw the machine out of gear and pulled out into stubble to turn for a new start. "Dick, Queen, Sam—damn your hides. Get along there," he shouted, as the sickle approached the grain.

From short range, Phillip stretched the sling all the way to his ear and let go. He had loaded with two pellets which separated in the air. They stung the rumps of both unsuspecting sorrels at the same instant, and the animals leaped.

Bob hung on to the lines. "Give it to 'em. God damn it, give it to 'em!" he shouted through the clatter of machinery.

Phillip began to yell also as he raced along side, firing as fast as he could load. Cog wheels whizzed with speed. The binder flew over the mud flat, kicking bundles completely across the carrier rack.

Bob called Phillip back as they mounted to firmer ground. "Put up your sling. Dad's over this raise. He'd give us hell, think we might have a runaway."

Phillip looked up at him, still panting from excitement and running. "I never missed a shot!" he cried.

"Yes, sir, you sure taught them a lesson. Bring your sling along tomorrow and we'll burn them again as a reminder." Then Bob's face spread into a most hilarious grin. "Won't Shannon cuss when he comes to shocking those scattered bundles!"

Bob's shouts and Phillip's return yells had carried farther than expected, and Phil heard them from the end of the field where he was inspecting windrows and repairing wind-damaged shocks. Though words were unintelligible the import of the commotion was clear with quick appearance of binder above the swale. Phil repressed his flare of anger as he watched the speed of its continued approach.

When Bob halted along side to let the sweating horses blow, Phil spat

out his tobacco quid and rinsed his mouth before he drank from the jug handed down. "You made good time crossing that gumbo flat."

"Yeah, it seems to be getting a little solider."

Phil saw the glance Bob gave Phillip, and neither looked at him. He restrained a new upsurge of heat at their deception.

Bob jumped to the ground and began to inspect drive chains and sprockets. "Maybe the worst is past," he said. "I hope so. I put this binder in top shape before we started, and yet I keep breaking down along with getting stuck."

"Mud and damp grain put extra strain on machinery," Phil told him. He followed Bob to the binder head and stood at his side, watching his face and the impatience with which he cut and dug with his pocket knife at a twist of tough straw that had wound into the disc pinion.

"It's this cussed stuff that makes the knotter miss tying."

Phil knew how well Bob liked to brag of running all day without missing a bundle or stopping except to oil, but there was much more than self pride to his exasperation at delays in this harvest. He put his hand on Bob's shoulder. "You're doing a lot better than other people. You can't fix the weather, son."

Bob straightened up. "I know that, but why does it have to happen *this* year!"

Phil dropped his hand and did not answer. The violence of the question was too much a part of a restless, urgent enthusiasm seen growing in Bob for all phases of war effort. Since graduation from high school, he thinks he's a man, thought Phil.

Bob closed his knife with a snap and prepared to remount the driver's seat. "When you take Shannon the jug, he wants some axle grease to smear his forehead," he said to Phillip. "The sweat runs into his eyes, shocking over there along the hedge where the wind is cut off."

"I'll take it to him," Phil said, and turned to Phillip. "You go home across the pasture and drive in the cows." He dipped a blob of grease from the binder bucket with a twist of straw, and after Bob and Phillip were gone, walked slowly in the direction of the hedgerow fence, gazing at the ground. Bob wasn't cut out for a life of planting and waiting and hoping. He's too impatient as I was at his age, wants to make things happen right. He's ready to rush in and fix the war like he does machinery—and like I thought I could fix politics. As soon as threshing is over, he'll want to go.

Phil accepted now the certainty he had kept trying to deny, that Bob meant to enlist, and in acceptance felt frightened and empty. He wondered whether Maggie had also guessed. If so she had not spoken, and Phil

had not for fear of seeing her break down. Her face grew white and her mouth trembled when the draft was mentioned for Shannon.

If it were only the other way around, thought Phil. I could talk sense to Shannon where I can't to Bob. Thought of losing Shannon enlarged the hollow within him and filled it with helpless anger against the war and frenzy sweeping the nation. "I can't stop them from taking Shannon," he muttered violently. "But they can't get Bob till he's eighteen without my permission—and, by God, I'll never give it!"

After his outburst Phil's temper subsided, but he felt no pride in his settled determination. Everything he had learned from life told him it was the right action and someday Bob would realize it. Yet he felt pain and apprehension for the clash to come. Something had been spoiled forever in relations with Clarence after their big quarrel.

Shannon had stopped shocking and was talking with someone when Phil came into sight. Through the hedge he saw the outline of an automobile by the roadside and on approach recognized Joel Palmer.

Shannon took his drink, and while he wiped his forehead dry for greasing, Joel finished his tale of Slim Higgins.

"He ate my grub and ran off with the clothes I bought him. Never did a tap of work for me."

"Some bums never do," Phil said.

"It leaves me in a fix. I've shocked what little I could when the weather was too wet to cut, and the woman tried it but just about keeled over from the sun. I thought being as you folks were on your last field, maybe one of the boys could be spared to help me."

Phil exchanged glances with Shannon.

"My wheat bundles are sprouting and growing fast to the ground," Joel said. "The government needs the flour," he pleaded.

"I guess I can finish here if Shannon wants to go," Phil told him.

Shannon turned so as to face Joel, and most of the stoop unconsciously left Phil's shoulders as he watched his son and listened. Shannon asked his question clearly and deliberately. "What wages will you pay your help?"

Joel flushed. "Why—uh—six dollars."

"All right. I'll be over at starting time in the morning."

"I'll sure be much obliged." Joel shifted weight and hesitated. "I'd of paid that hand of mine six if he'd asked it and stayed."

Shannon did not answer him, and Joel stood on his other foot again, face reddening by the second. "I guess I better be goin'. If my field gets dry, I want to cut a few rounds before sundown."

"That's a good idea."

Joel looked once more from Shannon to Phil and went off back through the gap in the hedge to his car.

Shannon did not even look after him. "If it hadn't been for the war, I'd have told him his grain ought to rot!" he said to Phil. "He's lost us a man from our threshing run trying to cut wages."

"You can't tell sure," Phil said. "Some hoboos are no good."

Instead of growing calmer, Shannon's voice rose with heat just as Bob's had. "Joel had no business trying to lower wages. He might have caused hired help to strike for everybody on the threshing run. We're having enough trouble saving our wheat with all these rains."

"You can't save grain worrying about the weather. It's your turn to thresh first this time; so you'll get yours out if anybody does."

"It's not *my* grain this year. It's the nation's and France's too. That's the only reason we took Joel into the run in the first place."

Phil remembered he had warned there would be rainy seasons when Shannon had first decided to try threshing from the shock. He remembered also Bob's question: "Why did it have to happen *this* year?" It would be useless to start argument with Shannon either. Maybe with football and all he'll stay in college until drafted, Phil thought. Later on I may be able to talk him into that much. Taking control of his returning fears, he spoke quietly and practically. "Well, now that you've made Joel sore, the thing for you is to draw your pay every day. That way you'll be sure of getting all that's coming to you."

Chapter 43

After his talks with the boys in the harvest field, Phil resolved to keep silent his war opinions. He wished he had from the beginning. I might have influenced them more, he thought. Instead he had denounced Wilson's peace slogan as campaign trickery and Andy again as a fool for joining the navy. "I'm proud to have an uncle like him!" Bob had shot back, and his face and voice had been like Clarence's years before. Maggie had looked at Phil, expecting him to shut Bob up as he had Clarence and ready again to support him, but Phil remembered the uselessness in time to throttle his temper. Andy was once more a neighborhood hero.

There was a lot to stir and confuse a boy. Corporal Oscar Karns' picture headlined in the *Chronicle* in training for shipment overseas, and Ezra strutting again like a little peacock.

It was Bob, who brought home news of talk of running Andy for

United States Senator after the war. "We'll elect him too!" he cried. "The country owes it to him!"

"Right now he might win," Phil said, "but people forget quick when the mess is over."

Shannon nodded, but Bob looked only at Phil. "This war they won't. There'll be too many soldiers to let them forget."

"We'll see," Phil said. "Time will tell." He saw his quiet refusal to be antagonized, antagonize Bob instead.

"I'll vote for him, I betcha!" he declared.

Phil wanted to retort: "If you're old enough!" Yet he held his tongue. I fail arguing or not, he thought helplessly. He felt better after Shannon, looking from one to the other, met his eyes and grinned gravely.

Within his family circle Phil was able to avoid the subject. But when the threshing crew assembled for Shannon's job the dinner topic was war, and Phil wondered how people who had voted for peace in autumn could already have become so belligerent.

In the dining room added boards to the table had extended it from wall to wall. Phil sat at the head to receive replenished dishes and keep them circling in a single direction. His little granddaughter, Clara, and Phillip watched from the kitchen doorway and looked hungrily at steaming bowls and platters piled with roast beef and fried chicken carried past by Maggie and Effie, who had come to help cook.

Except for a half dozen hobo pitchers hired by Kelly to complete his crew, all were neighbors about Phil. Plates were soon loaded with his food, and yet except for Haeckel so aware of his German blood, Phil felt like a spy in a hostile encampment.

Jim York thought the war would be the longest in history. "That Boche help to the Austrians finished off the Italians. They'll soon both be ready for another drive on Paris."

"The dirty Huns can never take Paris," Henri Loubet proclaimed. "But poor little Belgium will be a battleground again."

It seemed instantly to Phil that Henri had spoken squarely at Bruno Haeckel, but no one else seemed to notice Haeckel's wince. Shannon paused before taking another bite. "I'm not sure France will be able to stop another big drive if Italy couldn't. If—"

Henri's black eyes flashed. "Italians don't fight like Frenchmen."

"You have to consider population and resources. If France hasn't enough men left—"

"She stopped them before!"

"Russia was attacking Germany from the other side—"

"Russians don't fight like French soldiers either. They know they are right and have God with them."

Though determined not to argue, Henri's interruptions nettled Phil. Shannon was a college man, and he wanted his son to be heard. Chet at Shannon's side alone gave him attention, a silent admiration in his eyes turned on his friend each time he spoke. "Napoleon said God was on the side with the most cannons," Phil announced.

Henri halted before the words of France's great hero, and Phil felt warm pleasure from Shannon's appreciative side glance.

Shannon began again. Germany had lots of manpower left. She had the world's best scientists—our own chemists admit it—and big munitions factories and smart generals. "She'll only be fighting on one front now. The question is: Can the French and British hang on till we get there."

Phil had heard Bob and Shannon often in hot discussion of war strategy, and now Bob had forgotten food. "We need to wake up and rush an army across. Too many people are asleep in this country!" To Phil the loud tone seemed meant for him. He compressed his lips.

"I think we're moving pretty fast," Jeremy Hendricks said. "They've finished building Camp Funston and started drilling men there."

"Drill hell!" said Bob. "It's a waste of time to salute and parade and learn to stand at attention just right. Give the men guns, train 'em to shoot straight and put them over there to hold the line."

There was momentary silence of nodding agreement. Kelly speared a fresh hunk of cornbread. "I'd make sure the English do their share. They'll let us do their fighting if they can."

Shannon answered him. The British hadn't the chance to hold back on Pershing as they had on Joffre. Hindenburg wasn't fool enough to attack Verdun again. He had more sense than the Crown Prince. He'd go around north, and the British wouldn't dare let him get to the Channel.

"If he does get to the coast there won't be any place to land our troops," Bob said. "Let's send Roosevelt and some Rough Riders right away!"

Phil tightened his lips harder.

Henri waved his fork to be heard again. Old Hindenburg was nothing but a mad bulldog. "The way he treated those Belgian children—"

"Just the same he knocked Russia out of the war quick."

"Look how he did it—just like in Belgium, burnin' and gassin' whole towns of women and kids. Hindenburg and his Kaiser want all the land in the world so they can kill off everybody 'cepting Germans!"

Henri looked down the table toward Bruno Haeckel, and Phil could not forbear following his glance. The old Dutchman was eating steadily and looking at his plate. His broad, sallow face was immobile, but forkfuls of

food trembled on the way to his mouth. French, German, Irish—they're all prejudiced, thought Phil, and Frenchmen worst of all.

He heard Joel agree with Henri. Germans would do anything. "They tried to stir up Mexico to fight us, promised to help with an army and give them Arizona and Texas—"

"How the hell would they get their army over there!"

The unexpected question from a new section of table sounded as if hurled. Shorty of the hoboes leaned forward, cheeks hot.

"With them submarines."

"Why didn't we stay home where we belonged till they tried it?"

"And let them Boches butcher *our* women and kids!" Henri screamed.

"There ain't nothin' to prevent your enlisting, if you're so all fired anxious!" another hobo cut in.

"I'm too old."

"Maybe you got some boys."

"My Tommy will go when his turn comes! He's working in a war plant now."

"That ain't rushing into the fighting. And why don't you donate your property to help out?"

"That's Socialism!" said Archibald Palmer.

"I ain't no Socialist," Shorty said. "I voted for Wilson because he said he'd keep us out of war, and the first thing he did after we re-elected him was jump in."

Phil checked a nod to listen to Shannon's sober pronouncement.

"I don't believe Wilson ever announced that personally. It was the party politicians."

"He sure never denied it, and if he's so damned kindhearted, why don't he do something for the poor laboring man at home ahead of sending food and clothes and millions of dollars to Belgians? The workers in this country have been browbeaten long enough, and if this government tries to ship 'em off to be slaughtered for war profiteers, it's liable to have a revolution on its hands!"

"Uncle Sam knows how to handle Debs and his gang!" Arch told him.

Shorty's face turned dark red, but he was cut off from reply by Phil. Increased agitation in Haeckel everytime he looked at him and disregard of the sacred faculty of reasoning he was hearing, had broken Phil's control of his exasperation. Suddenly he was pounding the table with his fork handle. "I don't believe—" His voice and rapping broke together so loudly everyone started and stared at him. He dropped his voice to normal.

"Germany is no worse than other countries, and I think we should have

stayed out. She was as fair to Belgium as she could be in war, asked permission to go through peacefully and pay damages."

About the table faces stiffened, almost doubting that they had heard the words. Henri whitened as though stunned.

Jim York at last broke the hostile silence. "That's not the idea, Phil," he said. "Actually it's like somebody, say Joe here, claimed the right to trespass on my land."

"We have courts and the sheriff to stop you two from shooting about it," Phil told him, "but not nations. When Belgium refused, Germany simply told her: 'We have to go through. You can fight with us or against us.' France would have done the same if things had been turned around, and if the Belgian people had been more German than French they would have fought with Germany."

"That don't make it right, Dad," Bob said.

"There isn't anything right in war."

Bob had spoken his words so solemnly that Phil in his excitement answered them without recognizing the shocked humiliation of the boy.

Henri stood up out of his chair, black eyes blazing and his hands waving. He began to shout. "How about the things them Boches done to the Belgian women and kids? Is that right, hey!"

"I don't believe they chop off babies' hands. Nobody here can give me one good reason for maiming children. How do you know what they did, Henri? You weren't there."

"I've read it in the papers and seen the pictures!"

"I have too," said Joel. "They did it. They're all brutes!"

Anger and shame flooding Bob's face warned Phil, but he could not stop. It was all he could do to keep his tone down. "America has listened to British propaganda ever since this war started. German folks in this country don't torture and murder people—" Phil broke off, shocked at what he had said, for he had glanced directly at Haeckel. "They work and behave like other folks," he added quickly. And flooding with mortification at his own lame apology, and anger at satisfaction in Henri Loubet's face, he lashed out: "Anyone insulting Mr. Haeckel in my house will leave my premises!"

All faces were now turned with Phil's toward Bruno. He kept his buttermilk eyes confined more strictly than ever to his food. Sweat poured down his face; and his fingers twitched in their clasp on his fork.

Nobody said anything for a long, awkward moment until Jim spoke out plainly. "None of this was aimed at you, Bruno. We don't any of us have a thing against you." Jim turned after his words and almost belligerently faced Loubet, still standing, and Henri sat back down. Phil felt

Shannon's eyes shining with pride come to rest upon him, and he saw Bob looking from one to the other.

Maggie came bustling in with a bowl of fruit and an enormous chocolate cake and hastened to close the gap. "How much is the wheat making?" she asked Shannon.

"I'm guessing it at thirty-five bushels."

Kelly took it up quickly. "It'll beat that. Best wheat I ever threshed."

"Heaviest bundles I ever pitched," said Chet Freeman.

"Hope mine yields as well," Jeremy Hendricks said.

Phil gave Maggie a grateful glance. When she returned with pies, he made certain all desserts passed through the hands of Bruno, who was too miserable to ask for anything.

As they finished eating the crew straggled outside to shade for remaining minutes of their noon hour, but Phil stayed to help clear the table and set one end anew for the women and children. He ordered Effie and Maggie to lie down for a rest after eating. "Stack the dishes and let them set. Jim said Mary would be over to help this evening."

When he went out, Bob and Kelly had already gone to grease the separator and fire up more steam. At a whistle toot those in the yard emptied pipes and stamped out their cigarettes. They scattered toward the barn for their horses.

Bruno led his team over to Phil while he hitched to a grain wagon. Bruno hauled bundles and had left his rack loaded in the field.

"I ride mit you out?"

"Sure," Phil said.

Bruno tied his team to the rear endgate and helped Phil hook up the neck yoke and tugs. They climbed in and went rattling and jolting out of the yard. Bruno looked at Phil and away several times, visibly wanting to say something.

"You think America raise big army—to help France?"

"It looks that way."

Bruno peered into Phil's face. "You not think Germans bad people?"

"Hell no! They're as good as the French or English or anybody."

Bruno smiled back, heartened, but his expression of bewilderment did not leave. "Why people all talk of Boches and Huns?"

"Why? I don't know and neither do they. They've gone war crazy."

"But America she my country too." Bruno's agitation increased and he moved closer to stand almost before Phil. Desperate to make clear what he felt, he started gesturing. "I come here where no military training was, so I not have to fight, und my family know peace. I love my farm; I raise

my boy und girls there. My brothers stay in old country. It hard to send my boy to fight my brothers und brothers' boys."

"Maybe your boy won't have to go," Phil said.

"No, he go." Bruno's fists closed in sturdy pride. "My Adolph writes from Kansas City about Germany trying to make treaty with Mexico. Adolph says America our country now. The Kaiser can not come here. My boy fight like hell! Only—I not like people to hate us. Why they not all like you? I like you."

Phil flushed with pleased embarrassment. "Pay no attention to what folks say. When the war is over they'll forget it all. The fighting can't last much longer."

They arrived in the field, and Phil let Bruno off near the engine for a drink from the water jug kept there. Shorty and the hobo pitchers were waiting for empty racks to take them to the shock rows. They were squatted in a group talking in the shade of the tank wagon. Arch was on top, pumping water across through the hose to the boiler. Bob already had steam popping off again. Black smoke boiled slowly from the stack and floated almost level across the field. Bob hoisted himself with a spring up over the huge belt wheel and tested the governor. In his greasy coveralls and billed cap, he looked as old as a man.

"That boy mighty good engineer!" Bruno said.

Phil turned from watching his son and gave Bruno another smile as he untied his team's lead reins; then Phil drove on down to the separator and backed in under the grain spout. Kelly was clambering about among shafts and pulleys of his new, red-painted giant, oiling boxings and checking belt lacings. Finished, he got on top, stood up, and began knotting a blue cotton handkerchief around his neck to keep out chaff.

"How's it weighing out?" he called down.

"The last load over-ran sixty pounds," Phil told him.

"That's close enough."

A grain wagon stood filled and while Phil changed his team to it Bruno and Clarence drove bundle racks along either side of the feeder. Kelly waved his arms and the engine tooted in answer. It chugged out a great jet of steam, then another and another in slowly accelerating succession. The heavy drive belt slapped loudly, the wheels started to turn. Phil's horses pranced at the opening commotion, and he held their heads. When the animals had quieted as pulleys and rocker arms gathered momentum and settled into their hum, he mounted to the spring seat and drove off for the elevator.

It was a heavy pull out of the soft field. The horses leaned into their collars with heads bowed and arched backs, and with swelling leg muscles.

In the worn tracks of the township road the load rolled easier. Phil took out his pocket knife and tobacco plug, cut a generous chew and spat at the turning wheel hub. He dipped up handfuls from the wheat beneath him and let each trickle back, seeing and feeling the hard, brown kernels slide through his fingers. Shannon and Clarence were fools to sell their crop shares now at two thirty a bushel. It would be three dollars by spring—or more. This was Clarence's big chance to get on his feet with money in the bank if he'd bin his a while like I'm doing. With Shannon it's the war effort craze. Clarence pretended he sold to help the government, but he just wanted to buy a damned automobile. 'The first Garwood to own one!' he says. He doesn't need it, and it's not actually the first in the family since Hal has one. Those spending all they made and getting into debt were going to have a hard time when prices dropped. "I'll keep my wheat while the war lasts," he muttered, "and sell the day I get news it's ended."

Phil felt a twinge of conscience on hearing his words uttered aloud. How bad *did* the government need flour? But they can't use it all at once, he thought. Somebody has to store part, and I might as well get higher prices as elevator men and the bulls on the Board of Trade. Then it occurred to Phil that he had seen furor like that now taking place before, and this excitement of getting and spending more money was prosperity only for those who salted away the figures on cheap dollars until they would buy more. It had been so in the East before the Panic of 1873 and again before 1893. Only this time the whole country had been stirred quicker and deeper. The IWW, the strikes and lock-outs, McAdoo taking over the railroads—all the wide unrest of people aroused to struggle against people justly and unjustly.

Phil rode and thought of Bruno Haeckel, too, and his situation of disrepute from no acts or intentions of his own. He thought of Andy and his trust in President Wilson, so strong he had given up job and family to follow. And now Shannon will go and maybe Bob too. Then Phil thought of Bryan and his sacrifice of office and prestige out of disagreement with the Administration. This war was to blame for it all. But if it had brought the confusion, what caused the war?

An inner voice began demanding insistently and irritably that Phil find answer. Faithfully his memory brought back the explanation in his college history text: War arises from unrest through oppression of the populace of nations. There it was, the printed words.

Yet the inner voice rose again accusingly. But just now you had this war causing confusion, unrest, unhappiness and oppression—those very factors from which wars arose. No? So now you must retract. You had for-

gotten seeing this happen without war. Then if the war is not to blame after all, it becomes an event which occurs now and then as part of some larger pattern established long before wars began and to continue right on happening after America has won this one. Where is the part that really matters, the truth to which these seeming contradictions are not contradictions at all but natural consequences of what is and has to be?

"I wish to God I knew," he burst out. "Then maybe I could talk to that damned fool, Bob!"

Phil felt he was probing deeper than ever in his life, and became so absorbed that his thinking continued on the return trip from the elevator, scarcely interrupted by dumping his load. He scowled, frowned and muttered in his search; and he began to sense a splendid tumult in the whole. With it came sensation of living in a world of unreality. Reason rejected that, but the strange detached feeling clung and made him uneasy. Then there occurred the possibility that it might be beyond intellectual capacity of humans ever to understand and direct their own society. He rejected that also. To Phil, there was somewhere an individual or group—munitions makers, politicians or other leaders—who held the reins.

When Phil came over the hill to the field turn-in, he saw the threshing machine stopped and the men gathered in a divided group near the separator. Shorty and the hoboes as one unit faced Kelly, who was squatted with neighbors of the crew at his back. Phil popped his team with the end of a line and put them into a trot across the stubble. On approach he saw Shorty's face red and angry.

"We won't pitch another damned straw for less than seven dollars a day!" he shouted.

Kelly looked up from his kneeling position where he used one knee as a writing desk for his checkbook. "You don't need to stand there arguing. You're getting your time."

"Them checks had better be for seven dollars a day."

"They're for six, the regular wages you agreed to. You can take it or leave it. I know your stripe. You're too damned lazy to work."

As Phil stopped alongside, Kelly stood up and ripped the checks from the stubs. "Do you want these or don't you?"

For a moment there was complete silence without movement. Then a striker spoke out loudly. "I reckon we'll have to take whatever the thief will pay us."

Phil saw blood rush to Kelly's face beneath short, sandy whiskers and burn all the way down his throat. "Take 'em and get out!"

Shorty came forward for his last, burly body swaggering. He looked at the sum then straight at Kelly. "Don't think for a minute you're gonna

get by with this. I belong to the union!" He folded the check, and as he dropped his eyes to insert it into overalls breast pocket, Kelly hit him. The blow was nothing like the skillful, measured punch of a boxer, but a mauling, stiff-armed sweep like the kick of a plow horse. Shorty catapulted backward almost to his fellows before his legs gave way. On the ground he flopped convulsively like a beheaded fowl and went limp.

"He's killed!" one of the hoboes gasped.

Kelly stood rooted, stupefied by his own violence which had been involuntary. Something like a growl rose from the strikers as a group. They started forward, and Kelly retreated a step and crouched for defense. Joel and Henri, who were closest behind him, backed up hastily against Hendricks and the others. Chet Freeman and Jim York pulled pitchforks from the sides of their racks and laid hold of them in both hands. Bob came on the run from the engine with a monkey wrench. The hoboes halted, and the two groups hedged about, facing each other.

As Phil swung off over the front wheel of his grain wagon, Shannon pushed past Kelly. "He's not dead. I've been knocked out in football. Get the water jug."

Phil ran for it. When he got back Shannon was kneeling over Shorty, kneading his muscles in neck and jaws. "Dash some on his face, Dad."

Farmers and strikers drew back, both sides scared and watching the treatment hopefully.

Shorty began to respond. After a bit he pushed Shannon away and got himself groggily to hands and knees, then into sitting position. He shook his head vigorously a couple of times and let Shannon help him to his feet. He stood swaying, his pale gray eyes fixed on Kelly. Phil offered him the jug and he took a mouthful from it, spitting it out again with blood washed from mashed lips without his gaze ever leaving the machine owner. "Damn your soul!" he said.

He continued to look at Kelly until a companion took his shoulder and turned him away. In a group they went toward the road.

Clarence spoke first after their departure. "That breaks up our crew." In his dismay of realization, he turned half accusingly on Kelly. "What'll we do now?"

"Thresh with half a crew till we can get more," Kelly snapped. "They wouldn't have stayed with us for any price."

"Right," Jim York spoke up. "I hired two of their kind to shock, and they struck the first afternoon for seven dollars. I told them I'd pay it if they'd keep their mouths shut so my neighbors wouldn't have to raise. Next morning they struck for eight and I paid them off."

"You know how that one gypped me," Joel said.

Bruno came forward hesitantly and addressed Kelly. "My Adolph come from city next week to help at my place. Tonight I telephone und he come sooner to help all."

"Good for you!" Kelly cried. "Let's all look for new hands."

From behind Bruno, Shannon slapped the old Dutchman's shoulder so warmly that he blushed.

Phil saw cheerful determination enter faces. "I'll stay on with the crew. I guess I can still do a man's work if the sun doesn't get too all fired hot."

"And I'll bring in a load of bundles as often as I can between tanks of water," Arch said.

Chet straightened from leaning on his fork and flexed his body, long-limbed and lanky like his father's. "We can all work harder." The men looked at one another and together at Kelly.

"Let's get going," he shouted, "and we'll finish this field yet before night!"

They threshed the last loads of bundles after dark with cinder sparks flying up red through the smoke whenever Bob fired the engine. He and Kelly pulled the rig to Clarence's field during the night.

Chapter 44

The next day was Fourth of July, but no holiday with wheat waiting to be threshed. Everyone gathered into Clarence's first field ready again when Bob blew the starting whistle promptly at seven A.M. At first they walked and moved stiffly from the long yesterday, and Bob was red-eyed for he had risen at four to fire up steam.

Muscles loosened as the men worked up a good sweat. Bundle haulers ran their horses out to windrows. They dug fork tines deep into packed bundles, threw a leg over the end of the handle for leverage as if pitching hay, and heaved up half a shock at a time. They trotted the teams in again, perched on top of teetering, ungainly loads. And they kept a pair of racks always at the machine with two streams of bundles lapped to the bands riding up the feeder canvas.

Phil caught the group enthusiasm and felt younger and nimbler than for years. He was standing on the brake block of his wagon, scooping wheat forward from the grain spout, when he heard a bellow of "Fire!" Through cloud of chaff at the front end of the machine he saw Joel leaping up and down in his rack waving arms. "Fire—fire! The separator's burning!"

On the near feeder side Jim York took one look and stabbed his fork upright into bundles at his feet. He ran for the front end of his rack and the lines and struck his team. "Get your wagons out," he shouted to Phil. The whistle shrieked a blast as Bob cut off power.

Phil saw all that happened, yet for an instant could not move—Bob leaping down from the engine and throwing the drive belt, Kelly running the full length of the top of the separator for the ladder at the rear. Hendricks, waiting with his load behind Jim, followed too quickly upon York's sharp turn and they collided. There was a crash of boards splintered and ripped from sides of racks as the straining horses tore them free again. It was in that same moment with the hum of gears dying that Phil first saw smoke and scrambled into his wagon. He gave his drowsing team a savage cut with the lines, and they leaped forward with him to safety. When he jumped to the ground and looked again, smoke was pouring from the entire length of the separator and little tongues of flame licked out through crevices. The fire had started at the cylinder, and the draft from head wind and suction of the fan had swept a stream of flame through the machine from feeder to blower.

Phil shouted for Jim for help, and together they went back and pushed the remaining grain wagon out of danger. Someone was shouting for the water tank. Arch drove down with it. He was trying to back his frightened team in close to pump water onto the flames when Kelly waved him away. "You can't do any good now."

The strawpile was also ablaze, but for a couple minutes Kelly, Bob and others managed to endure the terrific heat for swift dashes in to salvage belts and wrenches. After that they all backed away a safe distance, and as they watched the whole separator became engulfed and the sides caved in upon the metal chassis.

Until in a group there, no one had had time to speak of cause of the fire, and then they all did at once and blamed the hoboes.

Henri blinked his black eyes and talked loudest of all. "You can bet your last dollar that Shorty was at the bottom of this!"

"Sure he was," Joel said. "All he had to do was slip into the field at night and shove a handful of matches inside a dry bundle."

"The thing is put the sheriff right on his track," said Arch.

"The hell of it is you can't prove it on him even if you can find him," Jim said. "We had that strong head wind, and it could have been a cinder spark. We saw them flying in the smoke last night after dark."

"They wouldn't carry that far, wind or not," Bob said. "You only need a cinder screen on when you pull in close to hook onto the separator.

Let's all go to town right now and start hunting that bum! We'll clean out the whole rail yards while we're at it."

"That's a job for the sheriff, son," Phil told him.

"He can deputize us like was done in Oklahoma." Bob turned to Kelly. "You're going to call him, aren't you, Mike?"

Kelly was still gazing at the fire which was burning down. Until addressed he had seemed unaware of the talk around him. "Yes, I'll get him out here," he answered, as if awakening,—“but there won't be a goddam thing left for him to see.” He raised his big, knotty red hands and looked at them, opening and closing his fingers. “If I ever get in reach of that son-of-a-bitch again—”

"We'll help you find him," Bob repeated.

Kelly looked at him and then slowly about at everyone else. He took a long breath and shook his head. "Thanks, but there ain't no call to turn ourselves into a mob. It's insured. I'll call the adjusters." He straightened his shoulders. "The main thing is to get back to threshing. I'll wire for a new separator and tell them to rush it. You folks at the tail end of the run stack till it comes, against chance of rains setting in." They nodded and he turned again to Bob. "You better drive the engine over to my place. No telling what might happen to it too, left sitting here in the field."

Because Bob did not have to help Kelly check any threshing rig, he was home early and free to go to the Red Cross program held that evening in the country schoolhouse. It had been advertised by repeated telephone line calls, and district patrons reminded by late afternoon tollings of the school bell.

After the fire, Shannon had dashed off with Chet to the river for a night of channel cat fishing without waiting for supper. Phil wished to avoid going to the schoolhouse, and at the table voiced the pretext he was too tired. He saw hostility promptly enter Bob's face and added quietly, "I'm not as young as I used to be." After the meal he made out a check for twenty-five dollars to the Red Cross and gave it to Bob. "You can turn in my contribution for me." Bob looked at the amount with no attempt to conceal an expression that charged miserliness. "I've been buying Liberty Bonds through the bank, too," Phil told him.

Bob answered nothing. He washed, shaved his scattered whiskers and dressed into clean overalls. Phillip was ready and gone before him, racing barefoot down the dusty country road to a whistle from Warten Freeman, Chet's little brother. "Wart" was two years older than Phillip and, to Maggie's misgivings, already indicated another replica of John.

When Bob arrived, families had gathered with seats occupied by the women and girls. In front of the teacher's platform stage curtains had been stretched across the room. Bob stood with the men along the walls. He held himself straight to be as tall as any. Talk was still of the burning of Kelly's machine and that neither Shorty nor any of his cronies could be found. Nevertheless Sheriff Collins had cleared out the hobo jungle along the railroad tracks. With deputies and town police he had rounded up the inhabitants and given them until sundown to get out of town. "He's going to meet freights from now on and keep the bums moving."

"It's high time," Joel Palmer declared. "They should never have been let stop. You heard the trouble John Freeman says they caused in Oklahoma?"

The windows were wide open for breeze. Through them came shouts and laughter of boys romping in gangs outside. They peeked in at the girls, rattled screens, and ducked back again. Bob glimpsed Wart and Phillip peering from beyond corners of sills. He pretended not to notice the activities outside just as the men about him did not, but he felt the healthy, irrational enjoyment of the boys in their antics. When not watching for them he was looking at the drawn curtains up front, inquisitive of what was going on back of them and impatient for the program. The youngsters came in when the bell rang, squeezing through the packed center aisle in a race to capture front row seats where desks were too small for grown-ups. Phillip and Wart got there among the first and sat together.

Principal Harrigan of Plainsboro High School and County Commissioner Platt were program committee leaders. An army chaplain in full dress uniform of captain joined them from backstage, and Platt rose and asked him to lead prayer. Stirrings of the curtains by passage to and fro behind ceased. Bob bowed his head with the rest, and he heard words crisp and determined—not like the plaintive psalmody of prayer in church.

"Oh great and powerful God who knoweth all, no need for us to remind Thee of the purpose for our drawn sword. Our sword is Thy sword, raised in defense of Thine own righteousness. Hadst Thou not spoken to our American hearts our swords would have remained as ploughshares. But Thou saw the carnage of the German war machine. Thou watched it invade lands of the innocent and peaceful and strike down women and babes. Thou saw fathers and sons rise in righteous defense of home; Thou watched them beaten backward and slaughtered until rivers ran red with their blood and Thou couldst endure no more. Then Thou said to America: Be thou my right hand and my thunderbolt. Unleash thy strength! Spare not thy blood and thy might! Strike down this evil beast that the whole

world may be free as thou art free, and the peace I have promised the earth may at last come now and forever to all men. We have heard Thee, O Lord. Thy words of command ring in our ears. Thy will shall be done!"

The chaplain's resounding "Amen" caught up by Platt and Harrigan was echoed by the crowd. Bob shouted his own like a cheer.

The hush on the room during prayer fell again. The curtains hung more motionless than ever. Then all unheralded came the clear, beautiful notes of a bugle, chilling Bob's spine. Thrills raced through his being as the curtains were whisked aside on a military band, instruments flashing in the white light of Coleman gasoline lamps. That light also fell in sheen on silken flags of Britain, France, and the United States hung in a central triangle on background of blue velvet with those of lesser allied nations in two winged lines. The lieutenant band leader was facing the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen: our National Anthem."

With creaks and shuffle the crowd rose in a mass. The chaplain motioned with his arms. "Join in, join in." Four hundred voices rose with the band which kept them standing through the "Marseillaise" and "God Save the King," to which they sang the words of "America."

Principal Harrigan was first speaker and explained the imperialistic menace of the German Government. "It is against this doctrine of military conquest and rule by despot that America has taken up arms." The American people had no quarrel with home-loving German peasantry. They had been misled, and we fought to free them as much as to preserve our own liberty. It would be a better world for all when humanity emerged from this terrible ordeal purged by fire! Some of his listeners had Teutonic blood. Harrigan had and was not ashamed. "When I think of the courage of the little German nation, scarcely twice as large as our own Kansas, withstanding endless months of war, I am proud to possess a strain of that sturdy blood. I have toured Germany, and I love the German people, but—" Harrigan lifted a menacing right fist high and smashed it down on the teacher's desk at his side. "But I hate the Kaiser!"

"Hooray," shouted Bob for his old teacher above roar of applause. He felt he must make his voice heard. "Hooray! Hoo-ra-ay!"

The chaplain spoke and pictured the ruthless German army robot contrasted to tender, sympathetic aid to wounded by Red Cross nurses. "They walk battlefields with no thought of danger though many are killed by falling shells. Even a German soldier will not fire intentionally on these girls, for he knows he, too, will receive the same fine care if fallen wounded into their hands." But the Red Cross needed funds. It needed the help of you and you and you. American doughboys would soon hold the

trenches. It might be your son found bleeding on the fields of France. Would you want nurses to lack bandages for his wounds?

"No, no!" rose from the audience.

"If not your boy, it will be someone else's. Is the neighbor's son less precious than your own?"

"No, no!"

"Then give tonight," cried the chaplain. "Give tomorrow, and next week give again!" He paused to speak on in quieted tone. "I regret to cut short my pleasure and inspiration from you folks here, but orders call me back to Fort Riley and my men. The train leaves in a few hours.

"In your display of patriotism and a will for right not to be broken, the world is assured it *shall* be made safe for democracy!"

He did not wait to receive his new applause. Harrigan darted forward to wring his hand as he stepped from the platform. The lieutenant band leader swung his baton on "Tipperary," and the chaplain, erect, stepped with fast military strides to the music down the center aisle—people pressing hurriedly aside in front and closing behind him. Lamp light flashed silver on double shoulder bars of his rank.

Those in charge prepared to distribute contribution blanks. Commissioner Platt called Ezra Karns forward and put a hand on his shoulder. "I have the honor to present the father of our first boy in France!"

Ezra swelled promptly and again at the applause. "Yes, sir, Oscar's over there! Got notice straight from the War Department. His ship arrived safe, it said. Got right through all them submarines!"

"You can be a proud man tonight," Platt said, shaking his hand. "Can you tell us of any special army duties of Corporal Karns?"

"No, sir, nothin' at all, 'cept that he's a fighting soldier!"

"Thank you, Mr. Karns. Now to start the ball rolling, I want you to give one hundred dollars for the Red Cross!"

Ezra winced at the point-blank sum then loudly announced compliance.

Down an aisle Henri Loubet at once pushed to the front, black eyes wide and both fists waving. "I'll give *two* hundred!" He faced completely around to the shouts and hurrahs given him.

Bob reached into his breast pocket and brought out Kelly's check for his week's wages. With fingers trembling in haste, he endorsed it and with the one Phil had given him also in his hand moved forward. As he passed Phillip the boy had a contribution blank in his hands, turning it round and round trying to read it. I'll go back and give the kid something to donate, Bob thought, as he handed over his checks. When he turned he saw Phillip bring out a crumpled dollar bill from his pocket and

with a shingle nail procured from the same depth, pin the money to the slip. At his side Wart eyed the combination enviously and whispered.

Phillip put up a shy hand to Harrigan. "I'll give this."

The principal peered down through his spectacles, and then before Phillip could have had time to know what was happening he was hoisted by the arm to the platform bill and all.

"Look here," Harrigan commanded so that his voice rang. He raised Phillip's hand with the blank in it high as the boy could stretch. "Here is the spirit. His dollar is right with it! Maybe the amount is small, but it meant more to this lad in his games than five hundred times as much from a property owner of thousands!"

Phillip was cheered longest and loudest of all. He looked back in excited glee as Bob shouted and waved to him.

"God bless you, son," Harrigan said. He returned Phillip to the floor and raised his own arms for attention. "Don't wait if you haven't wallets or checkbooks. Fill out the pledge blanks and pass them in. We are canvassing the country tomorrow to solicit those who could not come tonight, and we'll see you in your homes."

The band played "That Red Cross Girl of Mine" followed by "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and "Over There." Walls and air beat with music in brisk cadence for marching feet. Bob stamped with it. Blank distributors circulated anew and faster, and Platt received and stacked contributions, his shout rising with each above the band. "Fifty dollars from Clarence Garwood, thank you. One hundred dollars from Jim York, thank you. Fifty dollars from Archibald Palmer, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

Bob marched all the way home from the schoolhouse meeting. Phil was still up reading and Bob went straight to him in the silent sitting room. Phil looked up over his paper when he presented himself. Under his gaze Bob felt abashed as in childhood, and unable to speak to the point as he had intended, rushed out the words that came. "I saw Principal Harrigan the other day at the recruiting office and talked to him again tonight after the program."

"Has Harrigan been trying to persuade you to enlist?"

"No."

"He's paid to recruit above and below draft age," Phil said.

"I don't know about that. He didn't ask me. I went to him. I wanted advice on the best branch of the Service. He says the navy."

"You want to know if you can have my permission to enlist. That's what you're coming to, isn't it?"

"I've thought about it for a long time," Bob said, "and I ought to be in uniform helping my country."

"Well, son, I wouldn't give consent for you or anyone to go to war."

Disappointed tears spurted into the boy's eyes. It was the feared and expected answer, yet he could not stiffen his quivering of mouth. "I'll be eighteen soon. You can't stop me longer than that!"

"No, I can't hold you after that. I wish I could."

Bob flared up at the decisive calmness of tone. "If you had a spark of decent patriotism at all," he blurted, "you'd see—"

Phil cut him short. "There's no use arguing. You can't go, and that settles it."

Bob gave him a last cornered glance and rushed out. In his room he threw himself on his stomach across the bed choking back sobs of anger at Phil and at himself for having been reduced to tears before him. He was glad Shannon was not home. Bob controlled himself and lay very still when Phillip scampered upstairs and jumped into the adjoining bed. But though he could remain quiet, he could not restrain his thinking. He saw others marching away in smart uniforms with crowds and bands to see them off, and himself left behind. Oscar Karns was across already. Why couldn't I be old enough to be in the army? They would have cheered for me to-night. But I'll show them, Dad and everybody.

After Phillip slept, Bob tossed miserably, most of the time on his back with hands locked behind his head, searching for a way out. Toward morning and all unexpectedly he found it. After the first excitement of his inspiration, he felt quieting satisfaction of success. His inner turmoil of anger and frustration subsided, and his tired young body slept—happily unaware of the desperate, homesick sleeplessness of a million recruits enduring basic training in camps which had sprung up all over the nation.

When Bob came downstairs next morning he saw in Maggie's face that Phil had told her. He thought I'd go begging to her, but I don't need to. I know what she'd say: he did it for your own good. At breakfast he announced, "I'm going away to engineering school as soon as threshing is over. Kelly knows a good one in Wichita."

"Fine!" Maggie cried. "You always had a knack for machinery. We'll help you go, won't we, Pa?"

Phil nodded at once cheerfully. "I'll help you on expenses—"

"I won't take any of your help," Bob said. "From now on I'll make my own way in the world!" He saw Phil stiffen.

"Look here! If this is a trick to run off and enlist, I can tell you now I'll have you discharged and sent home."

"I told you I was going to school, didn't I!" shouted Bob.

Both saw Maggie looking wildly, pleadingly from one to the other, and for her each tried to catch hold of himself. Phil sucked his lower lip in tightly under his mustache; and while he held it there, Bob with shaking hand pushed away his bowl of cereal and left the table.

Chapter 45

Corporal Oscar Karns had landed at daylight at St. Nazaire on June 28th with the first A.E.F. contingent, 14,000 men of the 1st Division, mostly regular army troops.

While Ezra was reading the government postcard notice of his son's arrival overseas, Oscar and Company C of the 16th Infantry were standing at attention hearing an order read. It released them from medical detention to take part in the Paris Fourth of July parade as part of an honor battalion. Oscar swallowed saliva that welled into his mouth. It was the only movement he could make in response to the welcome prospects of early leave and whisky which he had not tasted since boarding ship in America.

Immediately upon return to quarters there commenced that tremendous flurry of activity with which soldiers prepare for a grand military display.

Along the length of narrow, wooden French barracks men of the second platoon bent over bunks or sat on the edges mending and cleaning. Hat crowns were moistened, carefully dented and the rims tilted to just the right angles, then placed on shelves above to set. Freshly washed puttees hung stretched and drying from wooden pegs. In the center of his squad Oscar laid out his best shirts with pairs of new stripes and the bright red 1, the divisional shoulder patch. He brushed away every speck before folding them for parade and evening.

Down the aisle big Jake Murphy rubbed and brushed at a stubborn stain. He looked across at Howard Wycoff and Anthony Powell, who were sharing a can of brass polish. "You fellows got cleaner?" he called.

"Over here," Oscar answered him, and set out a small bottle.

Jake came and moistened the cloth. "Thanks, corporal. Gotta look my best. French girls'll be wild and willing after the long shortage of he-men."

Oscar grunted. "You can have 'em. I've had clap once." He bent his bald head back to work.

"The medics'll be busy after the next short-arm," Dale Oakley said.

He spoke to Anthony Powell at his side, and Powell grinned. With the squad Anthony was a soldier among soldiers, but apart with a book, there came sometimes into his face expression of culture and education. Anthony

was a forest ranger from Alabama and spoke with the fluid accent of the deep South. "Don't look at me," he said. "Toby's the lover in our gang."

"Nerts," spoke up Gene Davidson. "That runt wouldn't last a night."

Little Toby Livengood wrinkled a snub nose, and lines spread fanlike into his pink cheeks. "The Chaplain said to be friendly with Allies."

"He also said to stay away from bad women."

"I wonder what a chaplain does on leave?" George Severns asked.

Men looked up, intrigued by the question but stymied for answer.

"It must be hell to be a chaplain," Jake Murphy said.

Toby took his shoes he had finished shining to the window light to admire their luster. He held them up, turning them from side to side for all to see. "Look at those! I could shave by them."

"You've got 'em so damn glossy if there's one speck of dust on them the CO will see it," Severns told him. "Say, wouldn't it be hell if a little thing like that kept us from passing inspection?"

Oscar raised his head. "*My squad had better pass!*" His voice and shifty eyes took in all seven members, fixing on none.

"Sergeant Noransky said Lieutenant Smith would check the company before Captain Danvers brought the Colonel," Dale Oakley said.

"Right, and I'm not getting Noransky and the Lo-oo-otenant on my ass." Oscar slurred the rank title for Smith, a National Guard officer.

Heads nodded to Oscar. "We've been tops since you took us in hand, Corporal, and we stay tops," Davidson said.

"I heard Pershing would review us in Paris," Toby said. "Think we'll get to see him?"

"Not from nearer than a mile," Severns told him.

Jake Murphy laughed at them. "Who the hell wants to see *him!*"

Item by item the men went over equipment. They examined gas masks and polished lenses, scoured mess kits to brighter than new, dug last particles of gum and grease from crevices of rifles, re-cleaned and re-oiled barrels and rubbed the weapons from muzzles to buttplates. Finished, the Second Platoon was inspection perfect.

French authorities had chosen July Fourth as an honor to the Americans on their first public military appearance, but they were more eager to stimulate morale in their own civilians and troops with sight of an American force in strength. The battalion arrived in Paris late of evening with no leaves until after the parade.

The Americans were assembled in the Court of Honor next day. High above airplanes patrolled the skies, and buildings about were crowded with people even on roofs. Lt. Smith announced an hour area freedom to see

the war relics on display. "It's the finest historical collection in the world," he said.

Oscar snorted when Smith had left. "We got Civil War cannons in front of every courthouse in America," he said. He lay down in the shade to smoke.

Most of the troops loafed away the interval. Of Oscar's squad Anthony Powell rambled and looked, pausing now and then before displays of ancient armor and lances which recalled legends of Roland. He wandered last into the Chapel and gazed at paintings of French battles about the tomb of Napoleon. When he returned he said, "These Frenchmen and Germans have been fighting ever since Charlemagne."

"Who was that guy?" Murphy asked, and Powell did not answer.

At the end of the hour the troops were ordered to fall in. By platoons and companies they executed flanks and turns in close order, closed ranks and halted in a square. Motionless at parade rest the rank upon rank of soldiers became a small sea suddenly quieted.

Oscar and Anthony were tall enough to see. Out in front was a group of American and French officers in stiff uniforms covered with braids and decorations on which the sun glinted. With them was the tall figure of President Poincaré in high hat and a little man in a derby. The group walked past the square of soldiers and to the chapel at their backs.

"Aa-tten-tion!"

The loud command was heard by all, but the soldiers remained frozen, awaiting relay to their respective units. As relays came, the khaki-brown sea stirred in ripples and became still again. Anthony could see the side of Oscar's face and the expression on it that said: Here we stand with our legs tying into knots, waiting while the bastards with brass strut.

The officials at last returned and halted before the troops. Within the crescent of his forward stare, Powell saw a standard bearer hurry respectfully forward with a silken flag conveyed to Poincaré by way of the hands of the little, derby-hatted man at his side. He had heavy eyebrows and long, fiercely curving mustache. The breeze tossed the golden tassels, caught in the folds and rippled the Stars and Stripes as the French President carried it to an American General. The General did a half-turn to receive it. A quiver ran through ranks, and Anthony's breath caught. It was Pershing! There came a roll of drums. On all sides Anthony could hear breathing of soldiers quicken with his own. This was just like Dad had said when General Lee inspected the regiment.

"To the honor and courage of America and her soldiers in this, their greatest hour!" said Poincaré.

"Thank you," said Pershing. He bowed stiffly forward, holding the

flag upright at his side like a rifle at order arms. The President, placing a hand on either shoulder, kissed both his cheeks. Anthony Powell had his thrill spoiled as Oscar's face muscles cringed at the wet caresses. Poincaré stepped back. Pershing stood at attention until he had retired.

"Pree-e-sent arms!" The order was sung out and relayed. The American band struck up the "Marseillaise" and the French played back the "Star-Spangled Banner." The staff passed along the reviewing line past Pershing, Poincaré, and Marshal Joffre side by side. More commands re-echoed down ranks, and again the static human sea heaved with movement and flowed away into a marching stream. The bands struck up old "Yankee Doodle."

"Eyes front!" the non-coms growled; and the men marched as trained to march, determinedly at attention, the slant of rifles exact and every soldier's gaze centered just above the collar of the uniform before him. Tramp, tramp, tramp. To the beat of the melody feet rose and fell in unison. They passed in a vacant lot batteries of anti-aircraft cannon manned by helmeted crews, guns ready-bared and search-light draped in canvas. Elsewhere colors and bunting flew from windows, rooftops, automobiles and carts. Flags were stuck in horses' bridles, in lapels, and waved in the hands of citizens. Tri-colours combined with the Stars and Stripes. From the immense crowd came cheers in waves.

Most of the men felt intense desire to cheer back, yet in disciplined silence each only held himself straighter, lifted his chest higher, sucked in his stomach flatter, and stepped sharper. Down the Rue de Rivoli they went, a grim spectacle for the French accustomed to dash and gallantry in their own troops on parade.

At the gateway to Picpus Cemetery and Lafayette's grave, reinforced gendarmes drove back civilians from the street and opened passage. Inside and once more formed en masse the soldiers were given: "Rest." Oscar was partly mollified to be allowed to stand in semi-relaxed position. The beating sun increased his thirst, and sweat trickled from under his felt campaign hat through grizzled hair of his temples. He could watch the ceremonies from closer range now and hoped that would speed time, for he could not understand the church-like silence of fellow countrymen. He felt as at crucial moments at Plainsboro gatherings—present yet discarded. If only he could get drunk!

Though still behind Oscar, Anthony Powell no longer saw him. Before the ancient iron railing guarding the quaint gravestone, officials were seated on stone benches. Anthony's eyes were one pair in thousands upon the scene. For him the uniforms had become Confederate Gray as the dignitaries stood and bowed their heads while a wreath was laid. Pershing with

Colonel Stanton at his side remained erect when other officials re-seated themselves. Stanton raised a hand and any stir of a spectator would have sounded like thunder. The Colonel's words came clear and resolute.

"Lafayette, we are here!"

A moment longer the two officers stood. Stanton's tribute was too unexpectedly brief and nobly fitting for the crowd expecting a speech. Those who understood English waited as in a vacuum for more until Pershing and Stanton sat down. A ripple of translating spread. Out of that came sobs choked back into throats, and the wildest ovation the Americans had ever seen broke for them. Through the rising and falling, rising and falling volume of cheers, one call came clear.

"Vive le Pierreshing! Vive le Piersseshing! Pierreshing! Pierre-eshing!" The demands grew to a concerted din. "Pierreshing. Vive le Pierr-r-reshing!"

Anthony's heart pumped so hard that he felt giddy.

Yielding, the General rose alone and once more uncovered his head. He looked long at the instantly silent multitudes. His throat worked in swallowing, and his military bearing became the more magnificent for emotion he could not hide. Pershing cleared his throat, and a tremor ran through the ranks on ranks of his countrymen. Powell saw Toby Livengood lean forward as if to meet their General's words. Anthony, too, strained to hear, but Pershing spoke low by comparison to Stanton, and his brief sentences were lost beyond a few yards. When he sat down, Toby looked sidewise up into the face of the soldier beside him. Jake Murphy's Irish cheeks were glowing. Impulsively little Toby caught and squeezed the big, red, hairy wrist. "I'd like to holler hurrah in good old United States!" he whispered. Anthony glanced at Wycoff, saw his features similarly lighted. Then their four pairs of eyes met. All were suspiciously bright, and they all grinned embarrassedly.

After applause for Pershing had died, the troops were called back to attention. The bands played anew, and they started off enroute to quarters. But this time in the street it was impossible to maintain military order of march, for the populace closed upon them. They held out baskets of fruit, squeezed into ranks to seize soldiers' hands and hang garlands about their necks.

"Vive la France! Vive les Americaines. Vive les 'Sammies!' "

A girl crowded warm against Toby. Laughing, he welcomed her, and she smiled back, tossing her little head and flashing berry-black eyes. Like an old friend she hugged his arm and trotted triumphantly at his side.

Toby struggled to bring out something from his army handbook on conversational French. "Co—mmon —Common vous a—ple vou?"

The girl opened red lips and laughed at him, showing bright, white teeth. "Americans speak my language so badly," she said, in prim textbook English. "Always the tourists did. My name is Marcella."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Jake, joined by Davidson and Wycoff. Jake dug an elbow into Toby's ribs. "You studying French lingo all the way over to put yourself in with the natives!"

The march was fast becoming a boy scout jaunt, and Toby pushed his rifle into the Irishman's free hand. "Carry this, damn you!" He caught the girl under the shoulders and swung her up to sit on his arm. "You're all right, Marcella. What are you doing tonight?"

"You Americans are very quee-ek," she told him. She secured herself on her perch by entwining a soft arm about his neck.

Toby squeezed her leg, to the interest of Jake.

"Ees your name Sammee too?"

"It's Toby."

"Tobias Percival Livengood!" Jake said.

"Shut up!" Toby moved his face nearer to Marcella's. "We're getting leaves tonight!"

Marcella stretched away. "I cannot see very good."

"I could hold you higher," Jake said.

"Keep your Irish lip buttoned!" Toby hoisted Marcella to his shoulder to forestall further offers. She took possession of his hat and rode waving it high as she could reach. All cheered her except Oscar, who looked and grunted.

"How's about it tonight, kid?" Toby fondled her ankles in urging.

She placed his hat, pertly canted, upon her head and peered down. "You think Marcella pretty?"

"You're a daisy!"

For a moment she looked puzzled; then understanding over-spread her face. She laughed widely. "A flower!"

"Will you go?" Toby asked again.

"Marcella works at Reaumur's place." She waved a hand in the direction of uptown. "Tobee will come there?"

"I'll say I will!" He slid her down, giving her a big hug.

Marcella refused to be kissed. She marched beside Toby as far as civilians were allowed and gave up his hat when gendarmes parted them, and stood as long as Toby could see her waving goodbye.

The entire squad went with Toby to Reaumur's, a long basement club room with alcove booths and a great many tables and a very small dance floor, beside which an orchestra was playing soft dinner music. It was dimly

lighted except for the circular bar at one end. On it light poured down, scintillating multi-colored through hanging prisms of a chandelier and sparkling off thin-stemmed glasses.

The moment the Americans entered talk died, and the diners turned to watch. Monsieur Reaumur came running, smiling from throat to crown and his hands all gestures of welcome. He led them to two tables pushed together in the center where they would be visible to all and ready spread with fresh, white cloth.

Toby's gaze searched faces of the waitresses. "Marcella?"

Reaumur's eyes sparkled still brighter. "Oui, Monsieur!" He turned and shouted something, and in a moment she appeared, tripping toward them on dainty, high-heeled slippers. To Oscar she looked like an animated doll in her frilled cap and tiny apron, and he grimaced at the expression he saw on Toby's face.

Marcella avoided Toby's outstretched hands, and his delight faltered. Reaumur spoke something to her for translation. "The Monsieur says you will not pay. You are his guests," she said.

"Say, that's all right!"

She turned from a look toward the far end of the room and this time smiled to Toby. Translating again she said. "Monsieur wishes you to try his special baked squab with mushrooms and cognac dressing."

"We'll take anything with liquor in it," Oscar told her.

Marcella bent near to Toby, whose eyes pleaded. "My lieutenant watches. He must think I am entertaining for the Monsieur." She arched her eyebrows. "The lieutenant cannot stay late tonight."

Marcella served them. First was consommé in wooden bowls with wine before them throughout the meal. With the main course came a basket of crisp-crustied, fragrant French bread broken into chunks instead of sliced. The Americans buttered thickly and chewed with relish.

"I feel sorry for the folks back home eating substitutes," said Anthony Powell, grinning. "Nothing's too good for the boys."

"Yeah, the sugar and white flour was all saved for us," Severns said. "Only I've never seen it in the chow halls."

"We're in the wrong outfit," Murphy told him. "We should have joined the French army."

After the meal Marcella offered to send them partners, and the men shouted approval, all except Oscar.

"What I want is liquor," he said. "Lots of it, the best you got." With a tall dark bottle handy in front of him, he pushed back his chair, burped, and loosened the collar below his heated face. Powell, Oakley and Davidson got up to dance, and Toby joined some French soldiers

singing at the bar. Across the table with a blond on his lap, Jake tampered with a champagne bottle. Severns and Wycoff sat watching him with interest, their arms around their girls.

"It's no good unless the cork will hit the ceiling," Jake said authoritatively. He took careful aim above and began easing it out little by little with his thumb. Pop! The cork bounced down again so close to Severns' head that he ducked.

"There's nothing wrong with that one!"

By the time Oscar called for his second bottle Jake, Severns and Wycoff were on the dance floor, teaching their partners American steps; and Toby, arms around two French soldiers at the bar, was harmonizing English lyrics to their language on "Tipperary." Oscar had located the French officer of whom Marcella had whispered—one of the famed Blue Devils. His gaze came to her as she brought Oscar's wine, and when she was gone, it again shifted to Toby.

They ain't putting anything over on that Frog, Oscar thought. I gotta see that the kid don't get in trouble. He glanced frequently at the officer after that. The Frenchman sat alone at a small end table smoking numberless cigarettes, his chair turned sidewise, his dark eyes wandering somberly over the club room scene.

Oscar was not altogether drunk. After a time he took his bottle and crossed over to Toby's rival. "Did I hear you speak English?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Sounds good 'mongst so much foreign jabber. —Have a drink."

The officer smiled very faintly. "Thank you." He sipped lightly at the glass and grimaced as Oscar tossed his off in a gulp. "I have studied in Cambridge," he said.

"Don't spare the liquor," Oscar said. "This wine is weak and these glasses hold almost nothing." He poured his own full again.

"I never get drunk except when we can find whiskey while under bombardment."

Oscar waited a moment for the drink to stabilize the other's face which swam in and out of focus. "It seems like you fellows give the Boches an easy game, resting half the time. Why don't your whole army stay right in there and lick hell out of them! This is your country, ain't it?"

Again the trace of smile filtered across the Frenchman's face. "When you have been in this as long as we have, Sonny, I think you will not be overeager."

Oscar took no offense at the condescending tone. The wine had suffused him with warmth, and there was something kindred in the loneliness

of this soldier who sat all evening apart. Oscar wanted to talk and reassure him. "Look here, Napoleon. You've got us wrong—like we didn't know what it was all about. There's millions of us coming over."

"Soldiers are of no use with nothing left to fight for. You did not start soon enough. Now you will only make the killing last longer."

"Don't you think we'll win?"

The officer shrugged. "Who knows? Someone must lose. If it is the Germans, you Americans will be called heroes." He ended the conversation by a glance to his watch and a last look at Marcella, talking with Toby across the bar. Rising, he turned politely to Oscar. "Pardon me, corporal. It is time I return to quarters."

Oscar swallowed the rest of his wine, and a wave of real compassion surged over him. "Wait, Bonaparte. If she's your woman, I'll tell my man to lay off."

The Frenchman paused. "It does not matter so much. Tomorrow I go back to the trenches. Soon he will go too. If we are both killed, Marcella will find still another man. Tonight he is her idol. Let him make the most of it."

Oscar stood up swaying and gazed after him, trying to adjust his sight to the military gait. Were all French soldiers such gloomy devils? Oh, what the hell! He looked down and rediscovered the last of the wine gone. Clutching his glass he lurched across the room back to his table. "Marcella," he shouted, "another bottle."

Toby followed behind her when she brought it, and after placing it she turned around directly into his arms. "You love me?"

"Do I? Oh boy!" They began to kiss.

Oscar poured and drank. As he leaned to put down the empty glass, the table came at him, and his big hand struck the surface so hard the slender stem snapped in his fingers and the thin glass shattered. His head fell forward upon his outstretched arms.

Chapter 46

All summer the 1st Division maneuvered in practice about peaceful French countryside, and in October was finally sent forward south of Verdun to complete training on the line in the quietest sector of all. If there had been likelihood of action there Americans would not have been sent. Franco-British high staff were skeptical of these raw, cocksure troops commanded by generals who obstinately advocated open warfare and a

continuous offense as the best defense: "Get the enemy to running and you've got him whipped!"

Occupation of trenches was to be carried out by battalions relieving each other at two-week intervals. Departure orders from division were delivered early, but when the morning came not enough transportation arrived. Regimental command issued a hasty clarification to some units of infantry to march overland, and Oscar's squad was among those troops.

As Company C under full pack took its place in the column, trucks with soldiers from luckier outfits were grinding out of the compound. The Indian summer day was warm and oppressively humid, and Oscar looked down the line at already sweating men waiting and watching others ride away. "Why do we have to walk?" one soldier asked. "They could have hauled our stuff for us," muttered another. "The Captain doesn't like it. I heard he tried to see the Colonel." "You can't argue with them high bastards. You can't even talk to them!"

Oscar had a loggy headache from a night of beer drinking, and resentment of the long hike before him burned into slow, sullen anger for the authority of commissioned officers so feared and detested by soldiers in ranks. They always screwed things up in the god damned army. Near by, little Toby pulled at weighted pack straps. The kid will hardly be able to stand time he gets there, thought Oscar.

The troops moved off in column of fours at route step with the men plodding slovenly from the moment of the command. For the first quarter mile their officers hustled back and forth shouting: "Close it up!" As fast as they corrected one gap another appeared. They were confronted by that mute mass will to resist which appears in displeased bodies of troops. These company officers were blameless; yet the men felt surly gratification in defying them. Within an hour all semblance of a smart military troop movement had disappeared. The column had become a long, broken line of men straggling down a dusty road.

Oscar had seen the phenomenon before and took special sour pleasure in the officers' baffled expressions. By noon when they stacked their rifles he was sweat-soaked through his woolen uniform and chafed raw about neck and shoulders. Their break was for one half hour. He took a single look at his men as hot and miserable as himself and threw off his pack without waiting permission. Wycoff followed instantly, and within moments all in sight had disencumbered themselves and were sitting at the roadside, prying ration cans open with trench knives. A speeding staff car with a star went by, but no one stood up for it. Funnels of dust left behind it drifted slowly over the troops and into their food all along the line. Complete silence followed as men began skimming the dirtied layer

out of their cans. Jake Murphy looked at his and pitched the container into the field. Others of the squad followed his action. Then they all sat back and rolled cigarettes. "I never could eat that slop anyway," Toby said.

Oscar kicked a pack with his hobnailed shoe. "Let's get rid of this damned stuff. They'll issue us more when we get there."

"Good idea," said Powell. He was tallest and stood up to watch out for Lieutenant Smith while the rest kicked earth over their spades and bed-rolls. "Next time, by God, they'll pick somebody else to go afoot," Davidson said.

The speed at which news travels ranks is uncanny. On the march again, kits and packs were flung under roadside bushes. Officers walking beside the column made a point of not noticing. They seemed self-conscious of their own lighter loads of only pistols and musette bags.

When men began discarding even their gas masks and lightening the belts dragging at their waists of the clips of cartridges, Lieutenant Smith finally addressed them. "You're putting yourselves in a hell of a spot to face an enemy," he warned.

Obdurate, complacent smiles appeared on red, sweaty faces. The soldiers knew they could not be sent into a fight without ammunition. At last Captain Danvers dropped back alongside the company.

"You men sent a lot of your equipment ahead of you on the trucks," he said, "and it's almost sure to be stolen." There was a momentary hush and then some scattered guffaws. "I hope you all brought your rifles. They are the one thing that can't be inventoried off."

They hoisted their weapons to show that they still had them.

"A good soldier is never separated from his rifle," he told them, and joined in the laughter, the first sound of humor since the march began. As soon as Danvers had left them a prolonged shower of articles sailed off into the rye field they were passing.

"The Cap'n's a good guy," Severns said.

"They'll cover for you up here where they have to depend on you," Oscar told him grimly. "They know they'd better!"

The company tramped more lightheartedly after that, flexing legs and swinging arms—until late afternoon when a weather change set in. The wind shifted, and by dusk cold, misty rain was driving into their faces. The column camped for the night on the outskirts of Luneville, chilled, tired and ravenously hungry.

Oscar and his squad scaled a fence and settled in a villager's back yard. They stood huddled together, looking in dismay at the two ration cans of beans and meat hash, all they had retained for supper.

"We've got to have more," Oscar said. "You fellows start a fire. Anthony and me will see if we can buy something at the house."

The two went off through darkness toward the front of the cottage, and the others began breaking branches from a clump of plum trees. They had just gotten bright flame licking through a pile of twigs when a bearded old man in peasant jacket descended upon them from the back door, waving his hands and protesting in vigorous French against use of his potato and berry patch for a camp ground.

Toby tried explaining their plight in English scattered with incoherent French words until the gardener emphasized his objections by stamping out their fire. At that point Jake and Severns took him by either shoulder and the seat of his trousers back to the house.

When they returned, Toby and Dale Oakley had brushed the scattered embers together and were down on hands and knees blowing them once more to a blaze. Wycoff and Davidson were breaking off more tree limbs.

Jake dusted his big hands. "What do you suppose was the matter with that old devil? It's his country we're fighting for."

"Maybe he's pro-German," Dale said.

"He won't give any more trouble," Severns said. "I boosted his ass in through the door with my knee."

They all started up defensively at new, swift footsteps, and Oscar loomed out of the darkness with a smoke-cured ham and armful of canned goods. "While Anthony was trying to buy bread from the lady and you boys were arguing with Napoleon, I slipped into the cellar."

His men encircled him and helped him unload. Toby enumerated. "Meat, butter, peaches, jelly—and there's spuds in the ground under us."

"You forgot cream for my peaches," Dale said.

Oscar grinned. "Cream is fattening. My soldiers stay in shape, lean and hard." Lastly he drew two bottles of wine from his blouse.

When Anthony came back he had a loaf in each hand but was swearing. "The Mrs. was going to charge me a franc apiece when the old man showed up and said five. The damned robber! If we'd had enough to eat without—" His eyes and mouth popped open at sight of the pile inside the firelighted circle of the squad. "Did somebody break into a grocery store?" When they answered him he slapped Oscar's back. "We've got the best damned corporal in the whole army."

The last of the day's resentment melted out of Oscar like the beer hangover sweated away earlier and he felt jovial again. "I always take care of my men."

The mist continued, and through the area campfires were kept blazing high. The men had scattered at once in search of food on halting, and

in darkness after supper fuel was hard to find. Pickets were torn from fences. Jake kicked the yard gate from its hinges and brought it to his group to be broken up piece by piece as needed. The old peasant did not leave the house to interfere, but he shook his fists at Jake from the doorway. With stomachs comfortably stuffed, Oscar and his men squatted with cigarettes about their fire, turning one side and then the other to the heat and passing the wine bottles. When the last was emptied Oscar took out his harmonica. From down the street they heard splintering of siding ripped from a cottage, and from far and near came voices in arguments with village inhabitants.

"If the police come down on us, there'll be a hell of a fight," Jake said, but no gendarmes appeared. The infantrymen by force of numbers took what was needed, and gradually the camp area quieted.

By morning the sky had cleared with a breeze, no longer humid and oppressive but dry and bracing, and the troops marched in good spirits the remaining kilometers to a reserve area behind the front. An inventory was run, missing equipment written off and requisitioned by telephone.

"When the news finally gets up to Division, there'll be inquiries all back down the line," Oscar said, "but new stuff will have been issued, outfits moved, and nobody will remember anything."

With the supply trucks next day came complaints from Luneville, and the Americans were fined two francs each for damage. The soldiers paid it good-naturedly, and re-equipped with shiny mess-kits and freshly laundered blankets marched on.

The French defenses were three miles deep with rear trenches and dugouts unoccupied. Between systems of these peasants were working fields. As Company C wound forward through a main trunk trench into the area of barbed wire and bunkers, soldiers constantly scrambled up the steep sides to look at their surroundings. Oscar kept his squad in the bottom. "I'm not a damn bit curious," he told them gruffly, "and don't you be."

The French began to pass them under full pack. Their uniforms were wrinkled and worn. The Americans cheered them and gave them cigarettes.

"We'll be as glad when it's our turn to go out," Toby said.

"Yeah, to Reaumur's and your little Marcella," said Dale.

"Bet she's the only woman he ever slept with," Wycoff said.

Toby blushed and made his voice boisterous. "Like hell!" he said.

Up front the Americans stared at the interior of dugouts, comfortably furnished from homes hastily deserted in the dark days of 1914.

Toby tested a puffy bunk mattress. "Feathers, by God!" He dumped off his pack and stretched out full length on his back.

Jake sank into a rocking chair and looked at his companions. "We'll have hot chow too. Jesus Christ, what kind of a war is this!"

A few French had remained to coach Yankee recruits, and while his squad got settled Oscar joined the officers and non-coms for briefing. A French major led them to the front trench and climbed up on the forward parapet. The Americans looked at one another, and after the Frenchman turned and looked back for them one by one they followed him up. Oscar raised himself only high enough to see over sandbags. Before him was a silent wilderness of tangled wire that was no man's land, and across it hardly three hundred yards distant a German flag hung from a short pole. He saw heads in coal skuttle helmets watching from behind sandbags over there, and he slid down again.

Above him the French officer pointed out a highway junction to be kept under observation. Oscar grinned at the nervousness of his officers beside the Frenchman. When they came down into the trench again he heard Captain Danvers ask, "Have they no snipers?"

"There are no military objectives in this sector," the major told him. "If we do not shoot at the Boche, he does not shoot at us. I advise you not to anger him."

To Oscar that sounded like an excellent idea.

Part VII For Uncle Sam

Chapter 47

By the time the 1st Division occupied the line, Kansas fields were plowed and sowed. The winter wheat was up and stooled, mile-square fields of lush green dotted by herds of red and white cattle grazing.

Migratory workers had moved northward with the harvest, speeded by Sheriff Collins and similar county law officers. From the Dakotas came stories of separators smashed from wrenches hidden in wheat bundles, and once the newspapers ran headlines of men surprised in the act of setting fire to wheat stacks and shot by the owner. Federal agents broke up the IWW national convention and arrested the leaders.

After Kelly's threshing run Bob Garwood had gone to Wichita to a school on gasoline engines. That much he revealed in infrequent letters to Maggie. He did not say they were engines for airplanes and that he had enrolled for flight training. The old folks were alone on the homestead except for Phillip, and Phil was farming again against his wishes for lack of a renter. The draft was taking the young men, and Shannon was back to college.

"If you take military training in school, you may get to stay to spring graduation," Phil had advised him.

"I hope so," Shannon said. "I'd like to get my degree before I go."

Neither could then take into account the tide of patriotism to fire college hearts. Bond drives and war lectures from the start of the term diverted students to withdraw to enlist. When Thanksgiving arrived, Shannon could not go home. The holidays had been cancelled for a war-benefit football game, the most special of the year.

On Wednesday evening Shannon marched with the team to the auditorium for the pep rally. He had complained with the rest of the men at dressing into full playing gear as Coach Wylie had ordered. But at the auditorium when the double doors opened for them marching in columns of twos like soldiers, and the band struck up and the students rose to roar—he was wonderfully conscious of the string of blue jerseys and clattering

of cleated feet, and of the two letter stripes on his sleeve. Trotting with his teammates down the aisle he also thrilled to the reverberations of the massed student yell and the charged atmosphere.

The stage background was a huge college service flag starred for each student gone to war, one fringed border flanked by a statue of a helmeted American soldier, the other by a Statue of Liberty. Bunting decorated the walls. Overhead, lines of pennants converged upon the Stars and Stripes in silk. He passed under it with his fellows between rows of brightly skirted coeds with war knitting put aside to watch them pass. Cheerleaders with red, white and blue megaphones leaped about the stage, urging shouts that followed the last players to their front seats. Shannon turned to his pal, round-faced, jarring Johnny Wakefield, and saw the whole team heads up and flushed. Goose pimples rose over him in response to the mass devotion to glory far beyond football.

The central cheerleader on stage waved for attention. "Come on now, everybody." Never had Shannon heard such a concentrated rumble as rolled from hundreds of throats. "Rah—rah—rah, rah, rah. Rah—rah—rah, rah, rah. Rah—rah—rah, rah, rah. Ag—gies!"

The noise had hardly subsided when the cheerleader was calling again. "All right. Once more and louder—for Uncle Sam!"

Shannon joined in, straining his lungs, tingling from toes to crown, and with his teammates threw his helmet into the air.

With vaulted ceiling and walls resounding, Coach Moose Wylie, chin thrust forward, strode to the platform. He flung up his arms. "We can beat Missouri tomorrow. We will beat Missouri if the student body is there to cheer the team as it is here tonight! Every cent of gate receipts goes to the Red Cross!"

Through another roar cheerleaders ran forward. "Give one for the Red Cross!" As the yell echoed President Jordan came to replace Wylie; and Johnny Wakefield, his Irish complexion high with excitement, leaned toward Shannon. "Hey, the big man himself!"

The President's crown of white hair, pressed suit, and posture were proper as always, but before the onslaught of greetings he smiled and held open his arms. Shannon had never seen his austere face so humanly touched, and the students quieted for him.

"When Coach Wylie asked me to speak, I told him no one need address our student body on this occasion." The propensity of college men and women for devotion and sacrifice to their nation's destiny had been amply demonstrated. America always turned to her colleges for leaders of spirit and action in her armed forces. The present challenge was the greatest in history. In thirty-five years of teaching he had never seen

college men and women rise so heroically to a crisis. "Look at the blue stars already in our Kansas State Service Flag. Can there be doubt its white field will soon be filled?"

"No, none!" shouted the students.

"Nor is there doubt in a college throughout our land. The Missouri team is enlisting en masse after tomorrow's game—"

Up sprang cheerleaders. "Give three for Missouri. Let her go!"

Jordan bowed to the cheer. "That was fine display of spirit, the kind that wins games and battles. I came only to announce a formal token for your patriotism by the State Board of Education. From this moment a college man who interrupts his education for military service will receive the full semester credits for which he is enrolled!"

For a fragment of a troublesome instant Shannon remembered Phil's enduring pride of blocking long ago the same action just announced. But Gene Lockhart, team captain, had leaped to his feet crying: "I'm taking you up on that, Prexy!" And again the tingling waves of goose pimples came and spread over Shannon's body.

Then beside Shannon, Johnny Wakefield stood up shouting: "Come on, gang. Let's make it unanimous."

The students whooped and stamped. Shannon rose after Wakefield with Swede Larson, Milofsky, Fairbanks, and the rest. Behind them the floor trembled to the thudding of two thousand pairs of feet; in front Jordan was motioning them to the stage. They vaulted on their hands over the parapet from the orchestra pit and milled under the glow of lights, cheerleaders running among them and slapping their shoulders. The coach put them in a row across the stage. Out in the auditorium Shannon saw the student body as a blurred and shifting mass, with some nearest individuals crouched gritting their teeth in efforts to yell louder.

President Jordan let the crowd exhaust itself before he spoke again in a voice full of emotion. "This is the greatest moment of my life. There is simply no defeating spirit like this spirit. May God bless each of you and bring you back to us safely and quickly." He wrung each man's hand.

When it was over the team marched from the auditorium, scattered and ran across the open quadrangle toward the gymnasium, throwing fake blocks at each other as they went. Shannon really tackled Johnny Wakefield, and they went down wrestling in the grass, cold with settling frost. "Damn you, Red!" Johnny hauled on one of Shannon's arms for a hammerlock, but Shannon rolled out of the hold. They sat up and looked back at the students pouring from the auditorium and lighting torches, forming a jostling procession to march to the football field. Cheering started again and the band struck up.

"I wish to hell we could be in on that," Shannon said.

"So do I."

They sprang up and raced each other to overtake the team.

The last of the string of players were clattering down the concrete steps when they reached the gymnasium. Inside the tin locker doors banged open and shut. A seventeen year old freshman who had his locker beside Shannon's sat before it on a bench, jerking angrily at his shoe laces. His jersey lay in a flung wad beside him on the floor. Shannon saw that his face was working.

"What's the matter, Sam?"

"All you fellows are going, and my old man won't let me." Involuntarily, Shannon remembered Bob's angry despair and saw Sam's lips so wretchedly near to weeping that he said nothing in consolation.

"No training rules for us on those three-day passes," Milofsky shouted. "Just a bottle of whiskey and an armful of woman!"

"Listen, gang," Lockhart said. "Let's all take the same streetcar to the recruiting station right after the game."

"I'm for that. No use waiting," Fairbanks said.

On a center bench Coach Wylie sat silent, watching all and listening. This was the team he had been building for three years for the championship, and they had won it for him. He picked up a broom straw from the floor and broke it into smaller and smaller pieces.

A popping of firecrackers in celebration on the playing field came to them. A basement half window had been left open for fresh air to the damp, smelly shower room. In his b.v.d.'s Shannon leaped and caught his fingers over the ledge. Muscles glided under the milk-white skin of his shoulders and gathered into knots as he chinned himself easily upward and held on a few moments, watching the rising streaks and bursts of skyrockets. When he dropped down again his face was flushed and his blue eyes shining. "They'll take over the dancehall and anything else they want when they march downtown!"

Coach Wylie looked at him and at the others. Several were dressed to leave. He sifted his handful of tiny broom straw pieces through his fingers and stood up. "This will be your last college night for a long time, and I'm going to turn you loose for it." A catch in his voice made everyone stare, and he thrust his hands into his pockets to hide their unsteadiness. "You'll make asses of yourselves, but I guess you're entitled to. You've made my reputation."

"You mean that, Coach!" Wakefield yelled.

In a rush they surrounded him pummeling his shoulders. He shook them off and his voice became again the hard, driving Moose Wylie.

"Come out sober for that game tomorrow!" He strode from the locker room.

The men renewed dressing in frenzied speed, to go home and change into better clothes.

"I never thought I'd see a day when Old Moose would show a heart," Shannon said.

The team went to the dance in a body. They got there after the management had surrendered the hall and paused together inside the door. The band was playing war tunes. Under spotlights a troupe of campus belles were dancing swirls, before a table on which stood a student auctioning kisses.

"Ten dollars I have. Who'll make it fifteen? Bid up, men—it's all for the Red Cross. Who'll make it fifteen?" He paused and wiped his forehead. "What, only ten dollars for the red lips of Barbara O'Day! Pucker, Barb, and show the boys what they'll get. Atta girl, that's the way they do it in France. You get a whole minute of that for your money, or you can pet with her all evening for a pledge to enlist. Step up and bid. Who'll make it fifteen?"

Lockhart called his team into a huddle, and when they came out of it they moved forward between tables and lined up.

"Clear the way," Wakefield shouted. "We're taking ours for free!"

At sight of the team set to charge, the crowd opened in haste. The band stopped as did the dance number. Ducking behind one another the girls began shrieking, "No fair. You got to pay!"

Shannon caught the eyes of a pretty brunette and winked at her.

"Fifteen, twenty-one, forty-eight—Hike!"

"Help! Rape!" screamed the girl in mock terror as Shannon lunged for her. She spun out of his hands with surprising agility, and turning after her, Shannon's feet shot out from under him, and he slid across the slick dance floor. When he scrambled up amidst howls of mirth from bystanders, his brunette was in Lockhart's arms, and the other dancers had been captured or scattered.

Shannon rubbed the hip he had landed on and grinned sheepishly at the merry faces around him. The first one he saw individually was a honey-golden bobbed head and two eyes as blue as his own, looking upon him with condescending smile. He never did see other faces specifically, for he was caught instantly motionless and stared at her alone. She stood before him statue-like, an erect, cool stance with high breasts that made her chest look arched.

"You're eligible too," he told her almost sharply. She was only just beyond arm's length, and he saw with satisfaction the consternation which changed her hauteur as he reached for her and she tried to step back. He followed swiftly and this time made sure of his grasp; and as soon as his arms had encircled her, she stood passive and looked straight before her. "You're not playing fair," he said.

The girl looked up at him, her eyes now almost darker than blue under their dark lashes; but whatever it was she intended to say, the words were not spoken. Instead her white-gloved hands came up involuntarily to his shoulders. In that moment of full, close meeting of their eyes, something passed between them. A startled bewilderment and excitement flashed into her gaze, and a strange, flooding warmth poured through Shannon. It seemed instantly to him that all of the questions and answers of a lifetime had been swept away, and his sole purpose in the whole universe was to hold this proud woman in his arms. And he saw everything he felt rush naked into her face to greet him with a gladness that was almost hunger and then panic. He felt suddenly self-conscious and confused. "No," he heard her say, yet she raised her lips and he kissed them and clutched her to him. In another moment they became conscious of the crowd and the noisy hall again, and mutually drew apart a little. The onlookers were cheering them. "Atta' boy. Atta' girl!" They released each other entirely, and Shannon saw that her face was burning as hotly as his own. He caught her arm, gripping it, and pushed with her through students toward the check stand. "You'll need your coat." He held it for her, whistled at the dark, glossy mink collar and felt his whistle relax them both. "We're going to a big dance in Topeka."

The girl moved on like an automaton under his rapid guidance. In the outer hall he released her arm a moment to hunt his own coat and cap from the piles thrown across chairs. When he turned back her mouth had tightened under the straight, small nose.

"I can't go with you."

"Of course you can," he cried. "All the team will be there. We made it up on the way down here, to each grab a girl and run before we were made heroes. And I grabbed the prettiest of all!" He stepped close to her, lifted her chin and kissed her. He was laughing and thrilling with the most wonderful joy at the fear back in her eyes mixed with a pleading to be taken.

"I mustn't go."

"Where did you get that husky voice?"

The girl's blue eyes searched wide and deep into his boyish delight,

and he saw again beneath her hesitancy how much she wanted to go. Behind them in the hall the band started, and through it came the chant of bids being taken anew.

"You're mine for all evening," Shannon told her. "You heard what the auctioneer said for anybody enlisting."

"You'll be gone tomorrow!"

He saw tremor in her lips after the words which had sprung out unintended, and again the marvelous, delicious thrill ran through him from fingers to toes. He caught her wrist and ran with her as fast as she could go in her tight skirt, all the way down the stairs and out into the clear, sharp air of the street.

From autos at the curb, Johnny Wakefield honked. He had the side curtains already unbuttoned. "I've been waiting for you," he shouted. "There's always room for more."

"The more the merrier," Shannon said.

"And the warmer," said one of the girls inside.

The back seat looked full, but Shannon crowded in with his girl. She sat sidewise on his lap—straight, slim and beautiful; and he saw Fairbanks appraising her in open admiration.

"Well, who is she, Shan?" Milofsky demanded.

The question brought realization to Shannon that he did not know himself, and he met the look the girl gave him with a gleeful grin. "Wouldn't you like to know!" he answered.

Milofsky's date cuffed him in mock anger. "What business is it of yours?"

"Chick, we'll all be gone tomorrow anyway," Milofsky told her.

"All right, I'll tell you when we get to France," Shannon said.

An automobile sped by with a prolonged toot of horn. "Lockhart and Rossiter," said Fairbanks. "Pass 'em, Johnny!"

Out on open highway Wakefield pulled the gas lever to the bottom of its arc. The Velie engine began to roar. The car bounced and swayed up to thirty-five miles an hour, but the red tail light ahead continued to fade away in dust. Johnny slowed his speed a little and relaxed back under the steering wheel. "This tugboat of Dad's won't outrun a wheelbarrow any more."

"We'll get there when we get there," Shannon said. He felt for the girl's hands, found them knotted into fists, one inside the other, and took them into his heavily gloved ones for warmth. She put her lips to his ear, and the touch of them tingled his whole body.

"Janis," she breathed.

Shannon looked at her and spelled the word lovely with his lips.

She whispered back, "Thank you."

His gaze went on searching into her eyes, and she read his question. She shook her head ever so slightly. A smile passed between them and they did not kiss. He settled her back closer to him.

In front Milofsky brought out a bottle and passed it. When it came to Shannon he held it to Janis, but again she shook her head.

"It'll make your throat nice and warm," Swede Larson told her.

"Not now, thank you," she said, and Shannon pressed a hand down on hers a little tighter before he tipped the flask and swallowed.

"Take a good slug," Milofsky said. "There's plenty more in town." He cuddled his girl on his lap and kissed her; then straightened her again. "Come on, Marge. Start a song."

"Will you all join in?"

"Sure. Let's have 'Over There' first; that's where we're going."

Voices rose, except Janis's and Shannon's. They leaned back heads close to each other's and looked out the isinglass windows across chilly, moonlit fields. Shannon could feel gentle pressure of their bodies increase and lessen as they breathed together. He wanted to be sure she felt it too and lengthened his breaths. Janis deepened her own to keep the rhythm. The warmth of their contact seemed to be flowing back and forth, and Shannon let his cheek touch hers.

The singing became loud and hilarious. A farmhouse loomed close alongside the road and a dog barked. A farmer with a lantern stopped at the yard gate to look toward them and listen. He shook his head.

"He thinks the younger generation has gone to hell for sure," Shannon whispered, and felt the tremble of Janis's silent mirth.

The song ended and Marge nudged Shannon. "You two, break it up. Everybody give out."

"They need another shot," Fairbanks said. "We all do."

Laughing, Janis again refused the bottle, and it seemed right to Shannon that she should do so. He took two swallows, and the whiskey warmth in his stomach, reinforced, began to seep outward. "'Tipperary,'" he heard Marge say. Janis sat forward and cleared her throat. Shannon took a long breath.

Johnny pulled the throttle wide open again. The side curtains billowed and flapped. Everyone leaned with the curves and rode with the bounces, and Marge clapped her white-mittened hands in time to their singing. "It's a long wa-ay to Tip-er—raree—"

Chapter 48

Shannon successfully slept off liquor effects of the party, because he had drunk moderately as Janis did. He awoke after his few hours in bed filled with an intensity for living stronger than he had ever felt before and a wonder that he had gone to sleep at all. He felt master of the world upon awakening, because he was in love and knew he had impressed the woman he loved. Yet he awoke without stirring or opening his eyes, for his first thoughts were of her, the same upon which he had finally dropped off to sleep as dawn was breaking. He saw again the picture she made beside him in the moonlight at her door, silent and trying to withhold; and by the strength and nature of that withholding betraying more than a declaration of love would have told. He could have taken her in his arms and kissed her and she would have pressed close, but instead he had only squeezed her hand; and he had known at once that his simple clasp pleased her more than anything else he could have done. "It's you and me and it will still be when the war is over," he whispered. "Will you see me off at the station?"

"Yes," she said.

In the dancehall in Topeka they had talked much of the time the others danced. How beautiful she had looked at the table with him, turning round and round with supple fingers the tall glass of sherry and ice she had let him order, and just occasionally sipping. She wanted to be one of the crowd, and yet could not help feeling herself set apart. "I guess it's always different once you've graduated," she said. "I have a degree in chemistry from Iowa." "That's my field too!" he almost shouted. She had turned quickly to him and then her gaze had become strangely intense as she looked on past. "I want to do graduate work next semester if I can get an assistantship."

"Research?"

"Yes."

"See Professor Schleicher," Shannon told her. "He's been my major advisor for two years. If you're good enough, he'll help you."

"I have the ability," she said quietly.

Shannon felt again the twinge of jealousy he had then. "By the time I get back you'll be way ahead of me. You'll have your Masters." Janis had not answered. "But I'll go on again as soon as the war is over." He related the wonderful experience of getting locked in the chemistry hall and of Schleicher luring him on, and her eyes had lighted up. "I wasn't ready to decide then. He saw it and didn't try to crowd me. But I know now that chemistry is the one work I ever really wanted."

"I'm sure it is," she said.

After that it had been easy to tell her he also was older than other students and of how he had worked for the chance to go to college and might not have made it except for the football scholarship. "I never had a steady girl friend. I never met one I wanted." At that she had looked quickly away. But she listened to all that he told her until he suddenly realized he had said, "I never even kissed a girl because I wanted to. That's the God's truth!" He halted then, blushing yet laughing. "Let's hear about you now." Janis had shaken her head and laughed back with him. "Some other time." Then they had danced, and Shannon remembered the lightness of her flowing movements within his arms.

Shannon turned over in his blankets, opened his eyes to the window, and looked out at mid-morning November sunlight. His roommate was gone and the whole house empty. The realization came that night, the wonderful night, was gone and this day was his last; and suddenly he felt empty too. Just when his life here had filled to overflowing he had to leave. Shannon closed his eyes again, and a hunger to remain engulfed him. He had never imagined a human wanting as consuming as he wanted Janis with him—at that moment and for all time. Out of thought of leaving her there came also that of Phil steadfast in opposition to the war. It brought to Shannon a feeling of having dishonored something within himself in going with the crowd. He sat up abruptly to escape the unpleasantness of probing that feeling. It was too late now anyway.

Shannon closed the window, got out of bed, and turned on the radiator. He stood and looked at the clock, told himself there was still time for breakfast. He would need food for the game. The air of the room was cool and dry and good. He stretched up and down, touching his toes, before going off to the warm bathroom.

The team suited up early after noon and worked out before the gymnasium. All were perspiring excessively when they finished and pulled on sweat shirts. They filed back to the dressing room and sat or stood in a spread, uneasy group—more tight-lipped and quiet than Shannon had ever before seen them from pre-game jitters. They avoided each other's eyes, and when Shannon's by chance met Johnny's he saw a reflection of his own forced and feeble grin. His gaze dropped instantly, shifting and roving across walls and ceilings, flitting over objects meaningless. Janis would be out there watching and if he should flub—Shannon's stomach contracted and his throat, already dry, turned thick. He went to the fountain but spat out the water which almost gagged him. He knew that his nausea was intensified from the hollow he had carried since his

morning thought of leaving her. He must forget that and think only of the game to play his best. He heard nervous, staccato talk around him. Only tall, gray-eyed Eldon Fairbanks, sitting cross-legged on a locker bench, seemed composed, and Shannon sat down beside him, forcing himself to take easy breaths and to relax his sweating hands. "Lord, but I'm scared," he said.

Fairbanks tousled his hair. "Come on, Red. You're a senior. You should be over that by now."

"I never get over it," Shannon said.

"Neither do I—inside," said Fairbanks.

Shannon grinned, bent his head forward and stared at the floor between his knees. Again came thought that Janis would see him, and he must play the best game he had ever played; and he felt sure also that he could not hold onto the ball standing still, that he could not even walk without stumbling.

Shannon looked up when all conversation ceased abruptly as Moose Wylie came in. He gazed completely around the team circle. "Everybody ready to go?"

Shannon swallowed with the others and said a forced, "Yes."

"Okay, you know what you're up against, which is mostly Mirandello—he's their one-man team." Moose thrust out his jaw. "Watch that wop. Stay on him all the time, take him out of every play, and don't have any mercy on him."

All nodded back to him, setting their jaws like his.

Moose waited a long moment and then snapped out: "What's our scoring play, Lockhart?"

"Triple pass."

"Right, and as soon as you get the ball, while they're still expecting you to feel out their line." He looked hard at Fairbanks and Shannon individually, and Shannon felt a tingling chill. "It's up to you two ends to make that pass click, and the first time. Score on 'em early then play it safe, because you men can out-defense them." Moose put his hands deep into his pockets and again looked at them all quietly. "It's your going away game, and I know you want to wrap it up and take it to France with you; so play it hard all the way and play it with the team. Let's go!"

They charged noisily up the stairs into the open and trotted in a line thirty men long down the campus hill. Their group enlistment had made morning headlines, and the waiting crowd exploded with cheers for them as they came into sight of the stands. Shannon looked for Janis in the Kansas section as he went by, but there were too many faces and waving

hands. Yet he knew she was there somewhere watching from that mass spread of fur coats, blankets, gay sweaters and caps. People were still gathering in, hurrying in clusters across open grounds around the field and streaming up sidewalks from automobiles parked down every street in block long lines. Custodians were scattering clean straw at the ends of the field for late comers to spread their blankets on.

Along the back of the stands and from special towers pennants and ensigns waved in the crisp, November breeze—Union Jacks and Tricolors and the flags of all Allied nations great and small with the Stars and Stripes dominating. A second roar went up from the Missouri sector as golden sweaters and helmets poured in through the gate over there. In the center of the bluegrass playing field the college band in white caps and blue uniforms maneuvered to the "United States Field Artillery March."

The team charged up and down the length of cinder track, churning their knees high. Shannon's tension of muscles loosened from the music and action. After Lockhart left with Moose to meet the Missouri captain and coach, the other players scattered, still prancing individually. Shannon and Johnny Wakefield paired off and began tossing a ball back and forth, occasionally passing wide or high to make one another run and leap. Shannon heard his name shouted and saw Lockhart back at the benches and motioning. He tucked the ball under his arm and ran with Johnny to join the last minute huddle around the coach.

"Missouri kicks off," Moose announced. He looked along the arc of players, his gaze stopping a second on each face. "This is the greatest football day you'll ever see. That's all."

Moose stepped back, and Shannon felt a wave of shivers over and through him. As the team wheeled, the band halted out on the field with a final tremendous crash of symbols, the white caps of one half of it spelling out a perfect U S on the blue background of the other half. Both stands cheered wildly, and when the voices died the notes of a trumpet sounded "the rockets red glare."

The two teams lined up facing the flag at attention amidst mass commotion of the crowd getting to its feet. A hush fell over the whole amphitheater, and the National Anthem was played.

While spectators were still sitting down again, the band marched off the field, and the teams ran out. Shannon took his position and tugged his helmet down solid, suddenly terrified it might not stay on. He looked at his shoes and the laces were tied. His feet were heavy chunks of ice. Don't let it be a short kick, he thought. Don't let it come my way. There was a whistle, and he saw the Missouri man moving to meet the ball.

He felt paralyzed until it boomed into the air and then he was moving, charging across to group with other men to run interference for Johnny when he made the catch. Shannon went down with a block, and when he got up he saw the pile-up untangle about Johnny on the Kansas thirty yard line.

In the huddle Lockhart looked about the circle of faces. "You've all heard what Moose said, and you all know what to do. We've got to get it right the first time. Let's go."

"Be sure you lead me plenty," Johnny whispered to Shannon.

In the line-up Shannon braced into his right end position to steady his shaking knees. His hands were sweating, and he wiped the palms dry on his pants leg.

"Sixteen, twenty-four, seven—Hike!"

Lockhart took the pass from center and fainted back and back as if waiting for a receiver far forward. As Shannon met the Missouri end he saw from the tail of his eye that the center of the Kansas line had held solid. He grappled his man an instant, counting to keep himself timed on the play, then let him slide free to charge Lockhart. Shannon chased him a couple of paces and stopped. On the left end Fairbanks had completed a similar deception and was waiting tall and straight behind the line of scrimmage with an alley open down the sideline. He received Lockhart's pass and tucked the ball under his arm as if to run. The Missouri backfield rushed to close the lane before him, and Fairbanks whirled and threw to the spot where Shannon was supposed to be. He caught it without moving as Johnny Wakefield went past up the right side line at full speed, and shot a flat, hard rifle pass after him squarely into his arms. He saw Johnny put on new surge of power, and the Missouri backfield turn too late. Their deflection had let Fairbanks through, and he was already cutting diagonally across to block out the safety man. It looked like a clear field for the long gallop, when a golden sweater with the black eleven of Mirandello broke from the tangle of the line in pursuit.

The long gap between the two men began at once to close. Shannon did not hear the wild yelling of the crowd as it came to its feet. He was not even conscious of his own actions of leaping up and down shouting: "Run it, Johnny! Run! Run!"

Through agonizing seconds Mirandello continued to gain, but they were also approaching the goal line. The golden sweater and helmet made a last spurt and fell forward, toes dragging the turf from momentum and hands outstretched for Johnny's ankles. Johnny went down in a lengthwise sprawl, and for a moment Shannon thought the ball might be over. Then he saw that it was a yard or so short.

We've got all four downs to take it over in, he thought, as he ran forward with the team.

Their huddle was brief as they hurried for the touchdown that was so close. Shannon heard screaming chants now: "We want a touchdown" and "hold that line."

Johnny carried the ball and hit a center wall of Missouri players. Lockhart tried the left side around Fairbanks. When Shannon got up from that play, jarred dizzy from a blow from a knee, the referee set the ball down for a yard loss.

"It was that damned Mirandello again," Lockhart whispered in the new huddle. "Eldon took the end out of my way, but he got to me before I could get through."

Johnny Wakefield wiped sweat away from a bleeding scrape on the bridge of his blunt nose. "Let me take it again," he said grimly, "to the right of center. Shan can shift left to go in in front of me and Swede and Milofsky can open the hole."

"Okay," Lockhart said. He turned to face fast, wiry, little Dale Rossiter. "Rossy, dodge through if you can and nail the wop."

They wheeled into position, and Shannon in his crouch saw the crowds on both sides of the field all standing. Yelling had become a din, and he thought of Janis watching. "They can't stop me," he muttered, and through his thoughts heard the signals. "Hike!" He charged left and saw a gap opening, narrow but wide enough to get through. He headed into it with the feel of Johnny's hand pressing his hip as he ran behind him with the ball. Then there was also the golden sweater and swarthy face of Mirandello charging in to plug the hole. Shannon lowered his head farther and went for him with pumping knees. He tried to catch him off center with his shoulder and spin him out of the way, but Mirandello took the lunge squarely and rolled backward with his fall to prevent Wakefield from leaping over them. The roll carried one of Shannon's arms under his opponent's body with a wrench of pain to the shoulder socket. Next came the weight of Johnny falling sliding on top of them both, and a crunching, excruciating stab shot through Shannon's upper arm. A great white sheet of fire with jagged edges spread flash-like before his eyes and burst into a thousand fragments.

When Shannon heard sounds again they were faint, far-off voices of Aggie fans. "Yea Garwood, yea Garwood. Red, Red, Red." Why had they left the stands if they wanted to cheer? The yells grew louder. He opened his eyes and there was no one on top of him. He was on the sidelines, with Moose and the college doctor kneeling at his side. He felt no pain at the moment, only a deadness of all sensation in his right shoulder

and arm. Then he became aware that the game was going on without him. "I can play again," he said.

The doctor grunted. "Not till you've done time in the hospital."

"Like hell!" said Shannon. He moved to sit up and hot pain shot through the numb shoulder. He fell back with mist closing in, but he never quite lost sight of Moose's broad face, though it swam in haze above. He knew when they put a stretcher under him. The crowd became clearly audible, still cheering his name, as he was carried past Aggie stands off the field; and he turned his head, looking for Janis. Hundreds of faces registered as a blur, but the thought broke across his mind lightning-like and wonderful that now he could not leave her, and he felt overflowing and afloat with dizzy joy.

Shannon was two days in the hospital before Janis came to see him. He was sitting up against the raised back of the bed with a book beside him, his thick red hair tousled and his freckles more golden than usual when he first saw her peep past the door left ajar. He lifted his good left hand gaily in greeting, and the flood of gladness through him flushed his cheeks. "I was looking for you ever since the first evening," he said, almost accusingly.

"I'm sorry. I called the hospital about you and came as soon as I thought I should."

"I thought you had missed the game and didn't know," he said.

"No, I was there—but I wished I weren't when I saw them carrying you off."

At her words Shannon's gaze upon her grew warmer even than his cheeks and she dropped her own. She set a basket of fruit on the stand and, opening her coat, came over near the bed and sat down. Her eyes turned to his wrapped shoulder and upper arm bound tightly to his side. "Was it pretty bad?"

"I don't know. They put me to sleep. It was aching like the devil when I woke up, but that's mostly worn off. The doc says I'll be all right." He grinned wryly. "Mom always said I'd get hurt."

"You've written to her?"

"The nurse did for me. I wanted you to do it, but you stayed away too long." He was trying to catch her eyes, but she would not meet his gaze. "Did you see the team leave anyway?"

Janis nodded. "I thought you would want to know about that. The band and SATC Corps marched with them to the station, and a special street car was waiting covered with flags. There were thousands of people there, and I know I'll never hear a crowd cheer again as that crowd. It

wouldn't have mattered a bit to any of those people if our team had been losers. Somebody started taking up a collection, and I have no idea how much the boys must have got, besides the baskets of things the Red Cross handed out."

Janis continued uneasy avoidance of his eyes. To Shannon it was confession that in spite of enthusiasm for all she had told him it was not what she wanted to talk about, and her shyness sent thrills through him. A nurse passing in the hall looked in, nodded and smiled to them. Shannon smiled too, and Janis looked after her. "That team was a grand gang. I wish I could have seen them off," Shannon said, and watched Janis, waiting.

"It wouldn't have been good for you, so much feeling and excitement," she said. "You'd have felt more lost than ever at being left behind and maybe guilty too, when it wasn't your fault. I know, because all a woman can do is stay behind."

Shannon's gaze had never left her face. His happiness at having her near had steadily grown until he felt swollen almost to bursting with it, and now he saw hunger and loneliness revealed to him in her profile. "The biggest thing that ever happened in the world has come in our life time, hasn't it?" he said soberly.

Janis's gaze continued to search out into the hall as if still following the white-clad girl. "Yes, and because I'm a woman I must miss it. If I only had nurse's training, I'd go in a minute."

"If you weren't a woman we couldn't be in love." Janis stiffened, and everything he had read in her face seemed to drain away.

"I wish you hadn't said that."

"No you don't, really, because we both saw it in each other after the first minute. What are you afraid of, darling? It never happened to me before either, and I'm not scared. I'm glad!"

She did not answer, but now she looked at him as if her gaze were drawn and locked to his against her will, and her eyes were frightened and dismayed. Shannon laughed a low, delighted sound such as he had never before known. "This is a hell of a proposal! I should be holding you in my arms."

Still she did not speak. Her expression told him she loved him. He saw that she wanted to speak, and it brought him a feeling of tender and serious sympathy. At the same time he felt he must hear her say the words, and again he asked: "What are you afraid of?" He waited but no sound came from her, and he felt himself smiling gently. He went on speaking, his voice strangely low and full, without knowing what he said except as he heard the words as they came out. "It's the finest thing that could

have happened to us, darling, and yet we had nothing to do with it—our meeting the way we did and being so much alike and now my accident to keep me near you a while longer. You were like a part of me in the first kiss you gave me—”

“Stop it!” Janis’s voice too was low, so low that it was a whisper and yet it was also a cry. He saw in amazement that her lips were trembling and that around the lipstick they had turned white. “I can’t go with you anywhere again. I’m married!”

Shannon stared at her unable to move, watching a pallor spread over her whole face until the rouge looked like blotches on her cheeks. “You can’t be married,” he heard his voice saying.

“No, it is true.”

Shannon winced as if slapped. A stricken paralyzed feeling stole through him, but still he searched frantically into her eyes for a denial. He saw her take a long breath, and her mouth began to look pinched and composed.

“I am Mrs. Janis Quinlan. My husband is Dr. Stiles Quinlan. He came from Iowa last spring to head the Department of Animal Pathology, and he was called from the reserves in the summer.” She pulled apart her hands in her lap and held up the left one with its wedding band.

“You weren’t wearing that the other night,” Shannon said.

“I took it off with my gloves at Topeka. I wore it on purpose this afternoon. I thought you’d notice it as soon as I came in.”

“I didn’t even see your hands,” he said thickly. The words were so difficult to say that he thought he would choke if he spoke more. He looked away from her for the first time and at the wall with no feeling at all left in mind or body.

“I’m sorry,” he heard her say. “It got started so unexpectedly and quickly, but I did try to stop us and couldn’t. I thought it would be only for a few hours and then I’d tell you by letter after you had gone away. I hoped you’d forgive me, but if you despise me it’s all right. I deserve to be despised.” Her voice choked and he heard her rise.

“Don’t go,” Shannon said.

“I have to. I waited till you were feeling well. Believe me, I didn’t think it would be like this when I told you. I shouldn’t have come at all.”

He turned his face and looked at her, and she was buttoning her coat. “If you hadn’t, I would have gone to you.”

“I could have left town.”

“I’d have found you wherever you went.” Janis turned hastily to the door at his words, but he had seen tears smart into her blue eyes. “Wait.

Have dinner with me one night before I leave." She shook her head not turning. "There's no harm in that," he cried. "Promise!"

Instead of answering she walked quickly from the room, and in the void left behind Shannon knew he could never let her go. He swung out of bed, the pull of sudden movement to his injured shoulder doubling him over. He could not follow her, but he stayed on his feet and got to the window. There, bent sidewise to relieve the pain, he watched her go down the outside steps and up the bend of campus walk. When she was out of sight he saw that there were many hurrying students and all across the lawn grass skirts of the winter's first snow, dry and dirty looking in the yellowing afternoon's cold sunlight. Then there arose before him image of strong-visaged, gray templed Dr. Stiles Quinlan; and Shannon shivered from another kind of cold entirely inside himself, and he wished to God that he had gone to army camp with the team.

Chapter 49

That same afternoon sunlight, so bleak to Shannon on the college campus as he watched Janis leave, shone warm on Texas—only hours in flying time from Wichita, Kansas. Overhead floated a few lazy white clouds, and among them a hundred miles out of Dallas Bob Garwood was flying. The air was so smooth and without pockets that he held the joy stick clamped between his knees. His thrill of anticipation each time he sped down a runway had gone once he had set his course, but not the unleashed freedom which always raced through him with the last swaying bounces into the sensation of being airborne. A part of that never left him, up where the sun felt hot and the air felt cool. There it was easy for Bob to believe himself in France. He played a game of lookout for enemy planes, with gaze roving continually round about and particularly above to his rear. The sky was blue, pure, empty, and unlimited. Patches of fluff drifted occasionally across the taut, oil-slick fabric of his wings, and when he looked under him the earth's surface was slipping slowly past. The plane vibrated stationary. After a while there crept over Bob a feeling of hanging in space, of an abandonment into complete liberty without power. The half-frightening sense of helplessness which came was accompanied by a thrilling, almost overwhelming urge to dive the plane under full throttle. He put his hand to the stick, but with touch feather-like and caressing which did not move it at all. He had power to spare in the new engine throbbing out in front. He pushed up his goggles and thrust his head outside the windshield into the good feeling of the

propellor blast to his face. Presently far ahead he saw Dallas and not long after the flag and wind sock of Love Airfield. Bob passed over it, looking down at the surfaced runways and rows of army-gray training planes with wings anchored to stakes along back edges of green grass taxi strips, at the staff cars and ant-like accumulation of army officers awaiting him. They were expecting a good show. Past them he secured his helmet and goggles and tightened his safety belt before turning back.

On the ground in the flat, low hangar, crews of mechanics clambering over airplanes in greasy coveralls heard the new, stronger sound in the plane passing over and ran outside—some with forgotten wrenches in their hands. They cocked heads toward the fading drone, watched the dark speck in the sky turn and grow swiftly larger.

"Here he comes!" shouted someone.

Near the field the plane descended upon them with a rush and roar. They scattered before it. The earth seemed to shake and wind screamed through struts and brace wires. The next instant the hangar building trembled to the thr-r-rump of landing wheels skimming along the level roof. The plane did not even bounce from contact, and an arm waved back from the cockpit.

"It's that crazy Garwood!" one of the men yelled.

"Nobody but a civilian instructor could get away with that," their sergeant said. "Christ, what a judge of distance!"

Out in front the small biplane banked upward, a compactly built single-seater with a French Gnome engine.

"Look at that baby climb. She's maintaining twenty-five degrees."

The sergeant glanced momentarily toward the group of officers, some with field glasses to their eyes. "I bet the Colonel is talking to himself about that shot across the hangar."

"Yeh. He's thinkin' how quick he'd spank the stunting out of Garwood's head if he had him in uniform."

"Wonder why the kid don't enlist? Pilots get commissions."

"His folks won't let him."

"Hell, they might as well have him over there chasing Jerries as testing ships. He'll get killed one way quick as the other."

Moment after moment they watched the plane continue to rise until as a speck again in passing beneath a cloud it seemed that the human palm could encompass it. The hum had grown faint.

"Watch it fellas. He's flattening off."

"There he goes!"

"A-aaah—"

The plane had held horizontal for only an instant and then nosed over, changing into an earthward hurtling streak.

"He's gunning the motor all the way down. I'd be scared for the wings on that crate!"

Breathtakingly near to earth the machine pulled tightly from its dive, shot up almost to a stall, and nosed over into a tail spin.

"He's awful damned low for that stunt. She sure must be sensitive to the controls."

At a thousand feet the little plane straightened out and once more began to climb. This time it did not rise so high before leveling off. It banked and came across the field. After it had gone over the officers' stand the plane nosed slowly down, gaining speed.

"It'll be a short dive this time—no. He's looping back."

"He—he's going to fly upside down!"

The men's voices cut in on each other.

"You can't do that."

"Well, he's doing it."

They stared at the helmeted head plainly visible, sticking down from the cockpit as the plane passed.

"How the hell can he stand that?"

"What kind of fuel feed do they have on that engine?"

Beyond the field the plane twisted slowly upright, turned and passed overhead—barrel rolling to right, then to left. It straightened again and with throttle open in a slow dive for speed streaked the full length of runway, flipped sideways and up, rolling over and over.

On the ground some of the mechanics were almost dancing. "Look at that damned fool!"

The plane came back and in a steep spiral climbed until once more tiny against the blue and white of clouds and sky.

"He'll be cutting her loose again any second."

The plane descended in a power dive lasting until the watching men's hearts rose to their throats. Yanked out it headed for them across the field with engine roaring, so low that they scattered again and threw themselves flat, and the backwash flattened the grass and tugged at their clothing as the plane swept over them and pulled up. They heard the engine throttled as they scrambled laughing to their feet, watched the plane still rising from momentum bank on a turn and head back into the wind for the length of the runway.

"I guess he thinks he's given them enough," one of the mechanics said. "It ought to be."

"He'll over-shoot if he tries to set her down from that altitude and speed," said another.

"Naw. He'll sideslip her in. See. What did I tell you."

The noise of the engine had ceased. The plane was coming down fast and steep, cornered into the breeze with the only sound now a high-pitched sighing of air through struts and wires. Barely yards above a certain crash as it seemed, the engine bellowed for one moment. The plane nosed upward, checking descent, and alighted true with the runway. Before it had coasted quite to a stop the engine revved again and with rudder cramped hard the tail swung with skid scraping. The mechanics ran to catch a wing and turn the ship around as it taxied to them.

With the propellor idling in a slow, golden-rimmed arc, Bob lifted his goggles and gave them an hilarious grin. Save for the white patch uncovered about his eyes his face was spotted with oil and grease. "She's sweet!" he shouted. "I never flew anything that could touch her."

"I'd like to see them perform in squadron," the nearest man said.

Bob unsnapped his belt and parachute, hoisted himself out, and slid to the ground. "I'd like to fly her with a squadron." He loosened his leather coat and unwrapped his scarf, paused for a moment to run his hand caressingly along the rim of the cockpit and to pat the fuselage. "Cool her down easy before you switch off, and then gas her up again. I'm going on to Kelly Field after I give your brass the statistics." He took an envelope of papers from his inside pocket and walked away to meet the approaching officers.

Chapter 50

Bob did not come home Christmas, and Shannon back from college said nothing of nearly enlisting with the team. He made light of his injured arm, just out of its cast.

"I told you you'd get hurt," Maggie said. "I'm sure glad you're through playing that old football."

"A man could crack a bone just falling down in the yard," Shannon told her.

He played less with Phillip, and what attention he gave the boy was perfunctory. The autumn duck flight had passed on south, but he hunted rabbits and squirrels—carrying only Phil's .22 rifle, for his shoulder was not yet equal to the kick of a shotgun. Afield with Chet he relaxed, but at home was restless and broody by turns. Even at New Year's dinner with

Clarence and Effie, Hal and Electra at the table Shannon ate with thoughts at intervals adrift from family surroundings.

"He's worried sick about something," Maggie told Phil that night as they lay in bed.

"It's the god damned war and the draft to catch him as soon as he graduates," Phil said. "Shannon's never really wanted to go. He's got more sense than Bob."

Maggie stared wistfully into the darkness. "I wish he had a girl. If he was engaged to a real nice one, he'd have her to come back to. He'll need a home of his own when he gets a job."

Phil did not answer that.

In the night Maggie heard Shannon rise and rekindle the kitchen stove. Then there was silence in the house again, and she smelled his cigarettes. She got up, stole across the dining room, and noiselessly pulled ajar the kitchen door. Shannon sat gazing above the fire, smoking with an ashtray held in his lap, his chair tilted far back and sock feet propped up before the glowing hearth. She slipped away again. She let Shannon sleep late next morning. When he awakened and came in to the oatmeal kept warm for him on the back of the stove, he announced he was returning early to college. "I want to start that back chemistry work hanging over me," he told them; but for himself he knew that besides prospects of burying himself in work his real wish was to be in the same town with Janis where by chance he might see her.

After school formally started for the last weeks of the semester, Shannon's laboratory assignments suddenly became complicated and advanced enough for graduate students; and one evening he repeated an experiment twice unsuccessfully. He read back through the manual of instructions and made sure of no errors. The analysis was quantitative as well as qualitative, and his equipment simply was not accurate enough. He stared at his impossible results. Why was Professor Schleicher pouring it on? Before he had been lenient and understanding. Shannon felt more challenge than irritation. He sat a few long moments in the silence of the deserted hall. It was midnight but he felt not the least tired or sleepy. Instead his mind seemed sharper than he had ever before known it. He picked up his manual and got another test tube sample from the store-room. Then he went down the corridor and with his master key entered a private laboratory room for research assistants. He turned on the shaded desk lamp and looked at the glassed-in cabinets, shelves filled with delicate, costly instruments. The room had not been used since its occupant had left to do government research, but as an undergraduate he had no

business in it and would certainly be in for trouble if he broke anything. Almost furtively at first, he began selecting and arranging equipment.

Shannon worked meticulously. The experiment went slower than anticipated, but absorbed he did not notice passage of time. He never knew what made him turn in the midst of slide rule calculations but he did, and Professor Schleicher in overcoat and cap was standing inside the doorway. Reddening, Shannon started to rise.

"Continue," Schleicher said. He came to the desk and over Shannon's shoulder followed his tabulations. "Excellent. Excellent! I knew you could do it," he said as Shannon looked up again, "but I needed to know whether you cared enough to try." He began unbuttoning his coat. "Go on and finish."

Schleicher sat, and whenever Shannon glanced his way the Professor's gray eyes were following his movements from under bushy brows.

He did not check results at the end of the experiment. Instead he leaned back still scrutinizing Shannon and slowly stroked the brush of his gray mustache. "You are a research chemist," he said, at last. "I cannot promise you will be a great chemist—no one sees well into the future. But I can tell you that you can become a good one."

"Thank you, sir," said Shannon, flushing. "I intend to be."

"That was not praise. You cannot take credit for being born with a scientific mind. Your father is a chemist?"

Shannon shook his head.

"His name is on this hall," Schleicher said.

"That was politics. He built it while on the Board of Education under the Populists. Dad never even got to finish college."

"He must have been interested in higher learning. The old deans speak highly of him."

"Oh he was! He wanted all his family to go to college, but I'm the only one who has."

"You still have a long way to go," the professor said. "When you finish here, take work in a specialized school of chemistry in the East, where there are more people and opportunities. And someday—" he hesitated. "Someday you should study in Germany."

"I know. They have top scientists," Shannon said.

Schleicher nodded. "The universities of Berlin or Leipzig would be best—if they are still there after the war." He lowered his gaze as if searching the floor and passed a hand across his brow. "It is not easy to speak when one is of German blood."

"No one can doubt your American loyalty, Professor," Shannon said.

"Excited people take action without reason," Professor Schleicher said.

"I think I still have university connections in Germany that would help you. The Germans are not villainous people, my boy. They are restless and experimental. In northern provinces where winters and nights are long, they have much time to sit by the fire and think. Something of both good and bad comes of that." He paused. "What I have said could be dangerous to me, but I have watched you for three years, and it is my best advice."

"I appreciate it very much, sir, and I shall keep it private," Shannon said. "When I come back from the war, I hope to follow it."

Again the professor looked at him. "There is much you could still learn here, and you need not go. You could get an exemption to do government research."

Shannon shook his head. "It's my duty to my country to enlist."

"I thought you would say that," Schleicher said. "It is not un noble. But the highest service one can give his country is service to all humanity. It is of little importance now that Henry Moseley was fighting for his country when he died at Gallipoli. Moseley did not belong to Britain because of birth there. Moseley belonged to the world. Does that sound unpatriotic to you?"

"No," said Shannon, "it doesn't. In many ways your views remind me of my father's. Sometimes I want to agree but it makes me feel like a shirker. If I don't do my part in the army like the rest, I don't think I would ever feel right about it."

"I see," said the professor. "In that case you will have to go. One must always be honest to conscience." He rose and put on his wraps, but before he left he came over and stood beside Shannon. "I hope you will reconsider, but in any case I wish you the best of luck. I'll always be ready to help you in any way I can."

"Thank you."

Schleicher smiled a tired, sad smile, turned and left the room.

From that night Shannon was troubled by indecision on enlistment, because he was unable to escape thinking about it and in thinking was compelled to acknowledge that one part of him had always agreed with his father that war was folly. As long as he had accepted army service as unavoidable, he had been able to escape examining inner convictions. Now he had to face the admission that his will was of influence and he could at least postpone going if he chose. He admitted never considering it passionately heroic as Bob did. In the easy course of following the crowd in volunteering with the team he had really been motivated by another feeling—one of missing out on something big in remaining behind. He could

not rid himself of that feeling by calling it emotional and shortsighted. Yet more enticing than all reasoning was the recurrent thought that by staying in school he would be near Janis. She would even be enrolled in the same department and could not possibly prevent him seeing and speaking to her. At still other moments his love told him such meetings would not be enough, and if he enlisted instead he would get to tell her goodbye. Surely she would not refuse that. He would hold her again in his arms, and one such moment would be worth as much as a lifetime.

Shannon's only intervals of escape from harassing thoughts were those in which he became absorbed in his chemistry. For brief periods, then, there was no world except the laboratory, and he abandoned himself to it the more gladly for the relief it brought. One by one make-up experiments were finished and typed. The sheets came back from Professor Schleicher scored in top percentages without comment. Schleicher nodded when they passed in the building, but he seemed to regard any renewal of their conversation as intrusion on his part.

Final examination week came, and Shannon still had not made a decision, but after his last test there was no further excuse for delay. He went to his rooming house to telephone Janis and found a letter from her on his desk. He tore the sheet inside in his hurry in opening the envelope. The message said: "I want to see you before you leave."

Shannon felt hollow of stomach as he washed and shaved, and his hands shook in fastening collar buttons and tie. In all thoughts of a last meeting there had always been a horrible inner fear that Janis might not let him tell her goodbye, that he would go without seeing her and never see her again. It did not occur to him that he never made up his mind definitely to enlist. He only thought now that he was going to her and she had asked him to come. All the way up the street tension mounted within, and when he stood on her porch ringing the bell, his legs felt numb and weak.

Janis opened and held the door wide for him, and his heart beat in slow, chest-shaking blows at sight of her small lovely face, frightened a little yet forcibly composed. "I telephoned twice but you were not in. I sent my note by special delivery, but I was getting afraid you had already gone," she said.

"I just got back from my last exam," Shannon mumbled.

He followed her inside to the living room and sat down. Janis placed a table between him and a chair for herself and set out cups. "I've kept the coffee hot. I hope it's still good."

"It'll be fine," Shannon said.

He became aware of austere surroundings only after she had gone to

the kitchen—the brown leather sofa, the dark walnut phonograph, book shelves loaded with thick volumes. The walls seemed to be closing in as he looked desperately around them all and on the mantel for a man's photograph that would be Dr. Quinlan's. There was none such, only an etching of a winter landscape and an oil painting of a sailing ship running before a storm. Shannon felt a sense of relief but not of release.

Janis brought in the percolator and also a package which she handed him. "That's a little going-away gift." She bent and gave careful attention to pouring. "It's one of the sweaters I've been knitting for the Red Cross—if you want it."

"I want it." Shannon turned the package over to find the knot.

"I know it will fit. I got your size from the athletic department." She laughed, and it sounded strange.

"I guess there's no use opening it now then," Shannon said.

He took the cup and saucer she handed him and began to sip. The coffee was black and bitter, but he did not notice the taste.

Janis tried not to avoid his eyes. "I hope you did well on the tests."

"I got through them all right."

"I was sure you would. Oh, I've been to see your Professor Schleicher. He said he would recommend me for an assistantship if I proved I could do the work, just like you said he would."

"That's sure fine."

"I told him you'd sent me and he spoke highly of you. He said your work was brilliant, and I thought so too. He showed me some of it."

"Schleicher is a wonderful teacher," Shannon said. "I always liked him, but didn't really get to know him until this fall." He told her of the recent night in the laboratory excepting the part which might sound pro-German. His voice began to sound natural to him for the first time since arriving. "You remember when Henry Moseley was killed last year?"

"Oh yes."

"I never saw anyone so broken up as Schleicher in class the day of that news. He choked trying to tell us. 'Moseley showed promise of a second Newton, and the world has lost him!' he said. 'One mind like his was worth more to mankind than a regiment of common soldiers!'"

"It's wonderful you'll have a professor like that to go on working under when you come back!" Janis cried.

Shannon's gaze had never left her face in her presence. His pulse throbbed now at the warmth of her voice; and words clear, swift and unpremeditated slipped from his lips. "You should be there too, working together with me. Think of the Curies!"

The composure Janis had managed until that moment broke down.

That is the most terrible hurt of all, her expression said plainly. Her gaze glistened and dropped to the floor. For a long moment there was tense and stifling silence between them. "I'm terribly, terribly sorry for the hurt I've caused you."

Almost accusingly Shannon's voice lifted in pitch to the ache that rose within him. "Why didn't you wait for me!"

"How did I know you would ever come—" She halted in confusion at her involuntary admission. He put down his cup, rose and went toward her, and she sprang up herself. "No, no, Shannon!" She moved to get away, and then he was before her with his arms around her, his blue eyes and freckles and red hair coming nearer and her face was upturned to meet them. They kissed long and desperately, and afterwards he held her cheek tight to his breast.

"I shouldn't have let you do that," she whispered.

"We couldn't help it. You wanted me to come tonight, and I had gone home to call and beg you to let me when I found your note," he told her. He was filled with the wonderful pleasure of giving her warmth and shelter and of her abandonment to it.

"I thought I couldn't live on without saying goodby," she said.

Shannon tightened his arms around her. "It isn't going to be goodby now, darling. I don't have to leave until the end of the semester, nor go to war then, if I apply for an exemption to enter a government laboratory. We're going to be together always!"

He felt an almost wild pressure of gladness from her, and then she stiffened and pulled away. "My god, how I wish we could be! But we can't, Shannon!"

"We can't stay apart." He started to reach for her again.

"No—please. Listen to me."

"Nothing you say can change what is."

Janis faced him and spoke swiftly, trying to sound calm and sensible. "I'm known among faculty wives. There would be whispers and then talk. It would get to your parents and even to Stiles overseas. You don't want scandal."

"Apply for a divorce and put it all out in the open. It'll have to be sooner or later."

Janis tightened out a quiver of lips. "I can't leave Stiles."

"You can't mean that."

"He loves me. He's offered everything he has in the world."

"More than I can give you?"

"It isn't what he gave, Shannon," Janis cried. "It's what he is!"

"You don't love him."

She did not answer. He caught her hands. "If you did I wouldn't be here." He bent and put his lips to her cheek, and it was cold. He raised his head, saw how pale she had become, and the chill of her cheek still on his lips seemed to spread down his throat into his chest. He dropped her hands and backed away. She did not move at all. "You don't love him," he said again.

They stood and looked at each other, dry-eyed and blanched in their agony of wanting, but with no change of purpose in her gaze.

"Why did you ask me to come here!"

Janis moistened her lips, moved them stiffly. "One last meeting—a kiss to remember. It has only broken our hearts—" She halted, closed her eyes tightly as if to shut out the sight of him, then opened them again. "It's all over. You had better go now."

"I told you I was staying on in school."

"Then I shall not enroll."

"We're neither of us any good for anybody any longer except for each other." His tongue thickened on the syllables. "Christ, Janis, it's you and me!"

Janis shivered. "Go—go!" she cried out. "Don't wreck your life. Go quickly." She turned and ran from the room.

Alone, the stern walls closed in on Shannon again. To escape he seized cap and coat and stumbled out the door. Until the cold air struck his face, it seemed as if his lungs were unable to breathe, and half a block down the street when his mind could think again his first thought was the wish that he had never left home to come to college, but stayed with the outdoor comradeship of Chet, Mom and her love, and little Phillip with his pranks—and with Dad.

Chapter 51

On the day after Shannon had finished his examinations and gone to see Janis, Phil went to Plainsboro with a neighbor who owned an automobile. He returned late, walking the half mile from the nearest corner. The air had grown cold with approach of sunset, and he walked rapidly in his black overcoat with cap pulled over his ears. Swing of his mittened hands and the stamp of his stride indicated angry thoughts. To shorten distance he cut across the woodlot grove and through the orchard, and there he was confronted by the extraordinary sight of little Phillip on hands and knees, dragging a bushel basket after him gathering peach seeds.

Phil stared and quietly advanced. "What's all this?"

The startled boy jumped and looked up but did not rise. "Teacher told us to bring all the peach and plum seeds we could find to school. They make charcoal out of them for gas masks."

Phil looked at the nearly filled basket and back at his son. He felt a new irritation stir within him that this same youngster who was always tired to death when asked to bring in fuel or water should work so industriously at this other task. "You too!" he muttered. Phillip sat back on his hips stock-still, his thin, dark face puzzled by the disapproval. Phil stood and looked at him for a moment longer and then went on to the house. While he was scuffing his feet clean on the porch, Maggie opened the door.

"Somebody from the courthouse telephoned for you. It must be important, because they called three times!" she told him.

"It was Judge Weatherford's office. They found me and that's why I'm late. I had to wait and ride back with Jim York." He followed her into the kitchen, the only room heated for their family of three. The window panes were steamy and the air rich with odors of browned roast beef hash and strong coffee. Phil began removing heavy outer clothing. "They had old man Haeckel hauled up in court for a hearing on pro-German charges, and he wanted me to testify."

"Bruno!" Maggie cried.

"Yes, Bruno. It's a damned outrage!" Phil stepped to the stove and warmed his hands over it. Maggie came up beside him, her eyes wide with incredulity and alarm.

"They aren't going to do anything to Bruno, are they?" she asked.

"I guess not, but you know, by God, he couldn't find a neighbor to testify in his favor besides Jim and me! He had never finished his citizenship papers. He took out his first and thought that was all. He didn't know, and they had him so scared he shook whenever he tried to talk to the judge. 'I see lawyer once. I sign papers once.' There was a federal man here investigating people under a new-fangled alien law, and somebody had reported Bruno. Judge Weatherford wouldn't tell, but I'll always believe it was Henri Loubet. He's gone war spy crazy since his boy was drafted."

"What on earth could he suspect Bruno for?"

"I don't know and he didn't know—if it was him. Everybody's out of his mind these days." Phil turned to face Maggie. "Remember how they arrested Charlie Grinstead without even a warrant because he said the draft wasn't fair here, that it didn't take married men with families

over in West Bend County? Charlie only got out of jail this week. It took them a month to find out he was telling the truth."

"Then they aren't going to draft men with children?"

"No. Our county draft board was wrong, and they've quit now."

Maggie drew a long breath. "That saves Clarence and Hal!"

Phil nodded. "Unless they change the law. They may have to, to get enough soldiers, as many men as are getting themselves exempted."

"What will they do to people who are slipping out of it?"

"They aren't doing anything, if the family has money and pull; and if a family doesn't have, the boy doesn't get out. Tom Larson, a big, strong, lazy cuss that's always lived off his folks, got exempt by swearing he was their only support—and the old man has six farms!"

Phil dropped his fists both clinched to his sides, and bit fiercely at his mustache. "That's why it makes me so damned mad to see them pick on Bruno. That government investigator kept heckling and pointing at him, saying 'this man' instead of calling Bruno by name. Jim York up and told them Bruno had a son in the army and had bought more bonds than anyone in the neighborhood. Finally Judge Weatherford turned around to me and says: 'Can you vouch under oath this man is of good moral character and has always been law-abiding?' I told him, 'Hell yes! I've lived neighbor to him for thirty years.' I oughtn't have sworn in court; they called me down for that."

"But they aren't going to do anything to him?" Maggie asked again.

"No. They finally let him go home. The federal man told him to finish citizenship papers right away and threatened to seize his farm if he didn't. He'd got his land under school lease and hadn't completed proving up on it either. He'll be under court surveillance till the war is over."

Phil's fists relaxed after his story, and Maggie moved pans from the back of the stove to the front to heat them piping hot.

"Maybe you'd better hold up supper while I get into old clothes and finish the chores before I need a lantern."

"They're all done. Shannon got Phillip to help him—"

"Shannon back?"

"Yes. He finished his tests early. He's gone to stay at Freeman's to-night. Chet's got his call to leave for the army tomorrow. Shannon is terribly upset about something. I wish you'd talk to him."

"There's nothing I can say or do," Phil said. "I've told you it's the damned draft coming nearer and nearer to him, just when he's getting most interested in his chemistry work."

"Well, I wish he'd stayed home. He's here so little now, and I miss

him more each time he goes back to school. Shannon's the only one who can get any work out of Phillip."

"He's working hard enough out there in the peach orchard," Phil said. He picked up his overcoat and took it to the closet of the cold bedroom where he changed out of Sunday pants. He hustled back to the warmth of the kitchen, pulling up his overalls as he came.

"I asked at the mill what they did with the first grade flour people took back like Hoover ordered," he told Maggie, as he stood snapping suspender buckles. "They said they rationed it and sold it again, so I'm going to keep ours. I've bought and paid for it and it's mine. We've as much right to good light bread as anybody."

Maggie hesitated. "Mightn't they arrest us?"

"No. Too many people are keeping theirs. We'll take back a hundred pounds to make it look right and hide the other sacks. Inspectors aren't going to poke right into people's houses. But don't tell the kids or anybody," he cautioned. His eyes turned to the ceiling attic hole. "We'll store it up there after Phillip goes to bed."

As soon after supper as the flour had been hidden, Phil took up his evening position before the stove with the reflector of the coal oil wall lamp trained over his shoulder upon his newspaper. Maggie as usual retired early, fatigued by the day; and he was left alone, chewing his tobacco—now gazing over the paper into the red glare of fire in the grating above the hearth. He kept the hearth open to spit into, and always had a stove hook at hand to give the fire breath and keep a bright glow of embers in view.

There was no important war news and had been none since the bloody rout of Italians by Austro-German forces had ended at the *Piave*. Phil finished the front column and lowered the newspaper across his knees. Nothing but vague accounts of minor clashes. French patrol activity here and English patrol activity someplace else. Always reports of "satisfactory progress" but nothing to indicate the end. How could anybody believe we were winning? Maybe the French and British were waiting for Americans to come over and do the fighting.

Disgustedly Phil raised the paper, opened it and began skimming—hoping to find something significant buried somewhere. His eyes stopped on an announcement: BOCHE SPY LYNCHED.

Briar, Wyo., Feb. 24.—An unidentified man thought to be a German raised his glass in a local bar this afternoon and shouted: "Hoch der Kaiser!" His toast was never drunk. A whiskey bottle

wielded by the husky bartender promptly floored the drunkard. Without even recovering he was hoisted on a rope to a door beam. The sheriff cut him down when he arrived, but it was too late.

The county attorney pronounced it "justifiable homicide" and. . .

Phil read no further. He stared over the newspaper into the fire, sucking at his mustache with a lower lip that twitched. He flung the paper suddenly and violently aside as his mind filled again with the afternoon scene of Bruno Haeckel in the courtroom. The old fellow might have been sent to prison and his property really seized! What in the hell was the matter with everybody!

Outside, the porch screen door banged, followed by a stamping of feet scuffed clean. The sounds found their way into one side of Phil's mind and brought the thought, only half recognized, that Shannon had changed his mind on spending the night at Freeman's. The kitchen door behind him opened, but no one entered; and abruptly, fully aroused, Phil looked over his shoulder. His mouth and eyes opened wide. On the threshold, tall and straight in a second lieutenant's uniform, stood Bob, on his coat the insignia of the Army Air Service.

"Hello, Dad," he greeted.

Chapter 52

Only Phil knew of Bob's return until morning. "No use spoiling Mom's rest," Bob had said. "I'll sleep in the spare bed room so Phillip won't see me and start yelling."

In bed Phil could not sleep but forced himself to lie still so as not to disturb Maggie. All night the same thought was before him in one or another aspect: he had failed with Bob as with Clarence. It brought painful doubts of how far he had or would succeed in counseling Shannon. He had always felt a measure of blame in clashes with Clarence for not better controlling his temper. I never understood his lack of ambition in everything, even for farming, thought Phil, with a twinge of envy he disliked for Clarence's affinity to live compatibly with the present. It irritated me as I irritated him in trying to arouse him. But Bob was quick to see ahead and the most practical of all. Why wasn't he sensible about the war? I tried to make him see it and only angered him. What did I do wrong? The last thing on earth I wanted was to turn him against me. He forced me to refuse him permission to enlist. What kind of father would I have

been not to protect him as long as I could! Everything I did and said was for his good. Someday he'll realize I was right, thought Phil. But that thought which had always given him pride and satisfaction before now held no comfort. The fact was before him that Bob was going to war. In a few hours he would be gone, perhaps not to come home again, and he was leaving feeling cold and distant. What shall I say to him tomorrow and in parting when it wasn't even me he came home to see? He'll be civil to me for his mother's sake, but what can I say to *him*? I can't say I'm proud of him. In a way I am proud, but it's of his independence, not his enlistment, and he wouldn't understand that.

When Maggie awakened at her usual hour to start breakfast Phil gave her the news. He took her hand and detained her beside him under the warm quilts and waited until he saw that she had seen the seriousness in his face. "Bob came home last night," he told her gently. "He has joined the army."

Maggie did not move until the corners of her mouth began twitching; then she turned her face into the pillow. Phil put his arm across her shoulders as they trembled, moved his hand up and stroked her head between the thick night braids that had lost much of their dark red bronze. "It's done and there's no use crying, Mom. We stopped him long as we could, but he enlisted on his eighteenth birthday."

"I thought he had got interested in his school and given up wanting to go," Maggie whispered.

"He had this in mind all along," Phil said. "He's been down there in Wichita learning to fly airplanes."

Maggie's whole body tensed, and her face turned with a jerk toward Phil's. "Flying—"

"Yes, he's an aviator, a second lieutenant."

"He'll get killed!" she cried.

"Maybe not. We don't know." Phil took hold of Maggie's shoulders for she had turned white and begun to shake. "Get hold of yourself, Mom. He's done all this himself, and we can't change it. You don't want to break down with him here."

Maggie shook her head. She swallowed and tried to relax. "You didn't get mad with him last night, did you, Pa?"

Phil half smiled. "There was no use. Maybe there never was of trying to hold him. He doesn't belong with us." He turned the quilts from himself and sat on the bed's edge. "I'll build a fire, and you stay here until the kitchen is warm. You're shivering."

"No, I'll go with you." They dressed together, moving quietly. "We'll let him sleep till breakfast is ready," Maggie said.

They did not call Bob however. While setting the table they heard a wild yell and guessed that Bob had slipped in and awakened Phillip. A moment later they both came running barefoot across the cold linoleum of the dining room and burst half dressed into the kitchen shoes in hand. Maggie seized Bob and kissed him, and he dropped his shoes and put his arms around her. By the time she let him go he was blushing like a small boy.

"Gee, Mom, look at his wings!" Phillip shouted, holding up Bob's coat. "And he's an officer, too!"

Phil watched Maggie force a smile for Bob and nod. "Your pa told me before you got up."

"Have you been way up above the clouds?" Phillip asked.

"Yes," Bob told him, "but sometimes clouds aren't very high."

"Will you be fighting Germans up there in 'em?"

"Hush a minute," Phil told him. "You're talking too much."

Maggie turned quickly to the griddles smoking on the stove and ladled batter into them.

"Hot pancakes and sausage and brown sugar syrup!" Bob cried. "We never get that in the army." Bob sat to his old place at the table, and Maggie stacked all three of the first cakes on his plate. Bob wanted to divide them, but Phil shook his head over coffee he was sipping. "There'll be more in a minute."

"We'll fatten you. You look thin and run down," Maggie said.

Phillip was looking hungrily at the cakes, and Bob winked and slid one to the boy's plate. "Here's the guy that needs to grow. The army just toughened me up. You get the best physical examination for aviation, and they told me I was perfect."

"When I get big, I'm going to be a soldier and fly too," Phillip said, and Bob slapped his shoulder.

"Good for you."

Phil tried to frown Phillip into silence, but he gazed at no one but Bob. Phil, too, noticed the squareness of the young shoulders in the military shirt, and each time he looked at them he could not repress pride from rising. "I don't believe you actually lost weight," he said, trying to speak naturally. "You're just taller."

"That's right," Bob said. "You get all you want to eat in the army, but they sure don't cook like Mom does."

"What do you want for dinner?" Maggie asked.

"Fried chicken and one of your thick, dark chocolate cakes!"

Phillip had stuffed his mouth and swallowed and was waiting to talk

again. Phil still could not catch his eyes to quiet him, and the boy spoke out determinedly loud before Maggie could answer.

"You're back in time for the school box-supper for the Red Cross. We got a dandy play, the *Kaiser's Nightmare*. I speak about the Kaiser's prayer, and we all sing a song like 'Marching Through Georgia' only it's 'Canning the Kaiser.' We sure fix the old guy!"

Bob nodded to him. "That's fine, kiddo. I'd like to hear you speak your piece, but I'm going on this afternoon."

"Oh— So soon!" Maggie cried.

"I forgot to tell you that," Phil told her.

"Make him stay, Mom, and have a party with ice cream like the Overbrooks did for Frankie," Phillip said.

Bob grinned. "I don't have anything to say about it. I'm headed for Hazelhurst Field on Long Island, and the most I could get them to give me was one extra day of travel time."

Dismay in Maggie's face silenced them all until Bob spoke to cheer her. "I might get a real furlough yet before I go to France." He turned to Phil. "Maybe Uncle Andy will haul me over."

"It's not likely," Phil said. "He's finished training at the Great Lakes Station and taken one short cruise, but in his last letter he said he was assigned to shore duty at Norfolk, Virginia. That's not so far from New York. You might have a chance to go see him."

"I'd like to," Bob said with a grin. "I'd like to see the look on his face when he has to salute me!"

After breakfast Phil telephoned Freeman's for Shannon to come home. He arrived shortly in his buggy, bringing Chet with him. Chet's draft contingent did not leave until afternoon, and he wished to ride around with Bob to tell friends goodbye.

"Clarence and Electra will be here for dinner, so don't be gone long," Maggie told them. "And you eat with us too, Chester."

Phillip followed them into the yard. "Why didn't you bring Wart along to play with me?" he asked Chet.

"I'll be going on to town from here instead of home," Chet answered.

None of the three young men noticed the boy's longing look at them, and they filled the buggy so he did not ask to go along.

Phil fired the big dining room heater and helped Maggie lengthen the table and dust extra chairs. Silent and alone with her all his night thoughts came back. He forgot to conceal his feelings which now brought a pained, distraught look into his eyes. He realized it only after he saw her notice, too late to hide it again, so he forced a smile and shook his head gravely.

He saw at once that his gesture had appealed to her more than any words he could have said.

Hal and Electra came early and brought a salad. Electra had gained twenty pounds since the birth of her baby, from the special diet and extra sleep Dr. MacGregor made her observe. There was rosininess beneath her milk white skin. She moved with springy crispness, and her eyes shone like stars when Hal promptly placed John Feldtmann in the center of the kitchen floor to show that the baby could stand alone. When Clarence came an hour later with Effie and Clara and a basket of fresh pies, Phil was riding little Johnny straddle of his neck.

Phillip began a game of jackstones with Clara. "Don't let Johnny get one of those and put it in his mouth," Electra cautioned them.

Dinner was waiting when Shannon, Bob and Chet returned. "We went on to see Mike Kelly after Granddad," Bob said, "and there were people stopping us along the road to tell me hello and wish us both luck."

The gathering was the first for the family in many months, and they filled the long table. Bob sat in the center on one side in full uniform between Shannon and Chet. Behind them framed on the wall was a three-by-four picture of a living flag that Andy had sent. It was an airplane view of ten thousand sailors formed to represent the national emblem in the blue and white of navy uniforms.

Again a feeling of pride came over Phil as he looked at his soldier son, and he sensed the sentiment in everyone of the family, even Maggie. Yet all avoided talk of war and army because of her.

There were platters of golden-brown fried chicken and the chocolate cake Bob had asked for, and hot biscuits fluffy white with no flour substitutes at all in them.

"I never had anything taste so good in my life," Bob declared.

"The first thing when you get back we're all going to meet at my place for a picnic on the river," Hal said. "You come too, Chet. You and Shannon can catch fish for a fry."

"We'll go a day ahead and fish all night," Shannon said.

Chet nodded. "Sure. There won't be many people fishing the next year or two, and lots of channel cats will have grown big."

"Me and Wart are going along!" Phillip said instantly.

Shannon and Chet both laughed. "You couldn't stay awake."

"We could too!"

Everyone smiled at Phillip, and Shannon winked at him. "I guess we'll have to take them," he said.

Chet's companionship and the excitement of Bob's homecoming had taken away his thoughts of Janis, and Shannon looked relaxed and normal.

Maggie saw the change with relief from one worry. Her satisfaction from it removed some of the prejudice toward Shannon's friendship with Chet and Phil's constant defense of freethinking John Freeman. She gave Chet a kindly, motherly smile which made him feel warm and rich without knowing why. Yet Maggie could not bear to look at Bob except in fleeting glances.

Through the meal, Phil said scarcely anything. He looked at Maggie frequently for signs of a breakdown until she noticed and met one of his glances with return gaze and a determined smile which said: "You told me not to break down."

Phil, Maggie and Shannon were the only ones of the family to go into town to see Bob and Chet off. "I want to go," Maggie had told Phil early in the morning.

"Do you think you had better, Mom?"

"Yes, I'll be all right."

Twenty-two draftees were leaving, the largest contingent yet to entrain from the town. *Palace Hotel* had offered the men a free meal and the lobby as a gathering place for the parade to the station. There was a row of flags on curb staffs along each side of Main Street. Flags also hung from windows, and yet others were carried and waved by citizens. Tapes had been stretched to keep the route free of spectators, and storekeepers closed doors to stand outside and cheer.

"You don't get send-offs like this, just joining up," Bob said. He stood very straight in his new uniform as he watched. This is old stuff to me, his bearing seemed to say, and yet his eyes were eager with boy-like excitement. Phil smiled faintly in watching him.

Up the street tramped bands of the local Home Guard and G.A.R., heading the march to the music of "Over There"; and behind followed Chet with his group, each carrying an overnight satchel of toiletries and a spare shirt, all escorted by platoons of home guardsmen. Just opposite Phil the crowd broke through the tapes and jammed the street. The army sergeant who had come from Funston for the draftees threw up his arms for emphasis and commanded: "Squa-ads, halt!"

Shannon and Bob exchanged glances at the wry expression brought to the sergeant's face by the jostling, impromptu stop of Chet and his fellows and their craning of necks to discover the cause of delay. "That sergeant can't bawl the boys out because they aren't in the army yet," Bob said, "but it'll be different tomorrow."

"I didn't see them do anything wrong," Maggie said.

Shannon returned Bob's grin at her remark.

While the city marshal and deputies cleared the way, the bands played louder as if to overcome noise of spectators shouting and waving flags.

"Forw-a-ard, march!"

The procession started again, and Phil and Maggie moved with the boys to keep even with Chet. There were mothers here and there with handkerchiefs to their eyes, and Phil glimpsed the stooped but still tall form of aged John Freeman, wearing his Civil War cap and hurrying as best he could with his cane along the outskirts of the crowd to keep abreast of his son. Freeman's seamed face was drawn yet firm and composed. Bob nudged Shannon and pointed to Chet, who had lifted his chest now and was stepping out in lively cadence, swinging his long arms. "It gets into your blood."

Shannon nodded and Maggie smiled bravely.

Near the station Bob hurried the family ahead. "I want on the train before the others to hold a seat for Chet and me," he said. Beside the car he bent to give Maggie a quick kiss, but she caught and held him. Bob looked foolish with embarrassment and also tenderness he could not hide at her embrace and kisses. "Shucks, Mom, I'll be home again before you know it." He released her arms and stepped back with mixed emotions on his face that made him look like a small boy and brought Maggie remembrance he had been her baby until Phillip came. With the thought words rushed from her for a moment unbidden.

"I wish you weren't flying. Oh, Bob—Bob! Couldn't you change out of it to something less dangerous?"

"Gee, Mom, there isn't much danger—and it's fun. When I come back maybe I'll have an airplane of my own and give you a ride."

"Me—fly!"

Bob looked down into the wretchedness of her forced smile and suddenly took her shoulders in his strong hands and kissed her warmly on both cheeks, the first such kisses from any of her sons since they were small. He let go of her, blushing more deeply than ever, wheeled and ran up the steps past the conductor into the car.

All the while in looking at Bob and his mother and away and back again, Phil was still asking himself: What am I going to say to him? He knows how I feel. What shall I say? He approached the window Bob thrust up a moment later still not knowing and simply reached up his hand. "Well, good luck to you, kid." He felt his clasp involuntarily tighten and linger. "Try to be careful."

"Sure, sure," said Bob. "I'll be careful." He did not see the tremor in the lip hidden under the gray mustache.

Phil released his hand. He turned his back to the train and cleared the mistiness from his vision while Bob and Shannon spoke.

"See you overseas," Bob told him.

"Sure, I'll be along," Shannon said. Phil heard the slap of their young hands meeting.

The three on the ground with Maggie in the center stood at Bob's window while the draftees were drawn up in the station yard into single file for roll call. The band ceased and Home Guard platoons disbanded, but spectators cheered louder than ever. Red Cross girls passed along the line, hanging a gift basket of candy, cigarettes and sandwiches on the arm of each. One of Bob's old high school classmates caught sight of him behind his parents.

"I didn't know you'd gone to war, Garwood," he shouted. He pushed forward to shake hands and stared at the rank and insignias. "You're an officer and a flier to boot!"

Bob flushed and grinned but was given no chance to protest. The other was shouting, "Hey, nurse, a basket for this man on the train. Hell, give him two baskets—he *enlisted!*" He threw back his head and opened wide his mouth. "Hurrah for Bob Garwood!"

Phil watched Maggie smile up at Bob as the gifts were handed to him, but he saw also her fingers closed into knots at her sides and he took hold of her arm.

Names of men were being shouted off now, but somewhere on the list an answer failed to come. As the sergeant called again the crowd became suddenly quiet. A third time the sergeant raised his voice, repeating clearly and loudly: "Nathan Stewart." Then he folded the list into a pad, entered a notation and continued down the roll.

Phil saw Bob stiffen. For a moment the general hush was broken only by sound of other names called and answered. Then softly, furtively people began to whisper.

The list was finished, and the sergeant announced once more: "Nathan Stewart." Then he turned the paper over to the emergency supplement: "Armel Charbonneau."

"Here." Charbonneau stepped from the crowd and joined the end of the draft line, surprise and consternation in his face. "I don't have a change of clothes or anything, sergeant," he said. "I wasn't expecting this."

"You'll be issued what you need after we reach camp."

Around Phil protests rose audibly. "D'juh get that? They're taking this boy for that fellow who didn't show up." "Who is this Stewart?" "If he's sick they oughta sent word." "He ain't sick. That's Carey Stewart's

boy, and they live right here in town—own a wholesale house and biggest part of the Comstock elevator!”

“This is a gosh darned shame!” Maggie cried out. Bob’s face was dark with anger. Phil looked at the two of them and then over at Shannon and to him smiled ironically.

Shannon, however, did not smile back. After a moment he said slowly, “I wouldn’t want to live here and not be able to face people as Stewart will the rest of his life.”

Phil had no answer for that and felt again the unbidden swell of pride for the manliness of his sons.

In the crowd, mood of anger was growing. “Slacker son-of-a-bitch! Oughta get him and ride him down here on a rail.” “Yes, and paint their damned elevator yellow so nobody’d sell ’em a grain of wheat!”

The outraged clamor seemed to Phil to have reached the stage for the mob action of Populist days, and he felt a tightening in muscles between his own shoulders. The conductor, a big fellow with sandy hair and a broad Irish nose, mounted the steps of the troop car and held up a hand. “If you’ll go after him, men, I’ll hold the train till you get back!” In the dead silence which fell he stood waiting.

Confronted by the conductor’s challenge to violence the crowd swayed and hesitated only for lack of a leader. Faces turned to Bill Addison, local commander of the Home Guard. Phil watched him look uncomfortably at his feet, then shift his gaze to the sky. Phil glanced at Bob and saw the expression of one hard put to hold himself in check. If he wasn’t up there in uniform, he’d be down here heading a mob, thought Phil. When he looked again at the crowd, the critical moment for action had passed. The conductor stepped down in disgust, placed his stepping stool in position, and the draftees began filing aboard. Representatives of local stores pushed to the car with more baskets and started tossing cigarettes and candy bars in through the windows. Cheering and flag waving began again, furtively at first, then with fervor as townspeople closed in and began to flip coins into the car.

Chet’s head appeared at the window with Bob’s, and the boys leaned far out, arms around each other’s shoulders. Old John Freeman came up beside Phil and Maggie. He straightened his stooped body, and his expression was steadfastly proud as he reached for Chet’s hand. “Remember, son, you don’t have to be a bum to be a good soldier.”

“I will, Dad.”

Phil swallowed hard. He saw that Maggie had locked her jaws until the muscles below her cheeks swelled and quivered, and he took her arm again. The conductor threw his stool into the vestibule. He looked

down the tracks and toward the engine and waved his arms. "All aboard." People drew back from the wheels. The band began "Good-bye Broadway, Hello France." Harsh, rasping jets of steam issued from the locomotive, the train moved, and the conductor swung to the steps.

Chet and Bob waved. "Goodby Mom, Dad, everybody," they shouted together. John Freeman, still erect, snapped his right hand up to his blue cap. A great, single sob broke suddenly from Maggie. She started to run after the train, half hurling herself toward it and hauling Phil a step before his hardening grasp together with a quick hand from Shannon got her stopped. Held by both she did not struggle but stood between them sobbing tears which poured down her cheeks.

The cheering of the crowd reached a crescendo as voices commenced singing with the band—"we're ten million strong." A great shower of candy bars and cigarette packs flew through the air. One enthusiastic citizen cracked a window pane, heaving silver dollars after the many hands stretched forth in farewell.

Chapter 53

From the day Shannon saw Bob come home in uniform and depart with Chet, he knew he had no choice within himself but to go to war. He left college early in March and came home to cancel his educational deferment with the Plainsboro draft board and asked to leave with the next call. "They gave me a semester's credits, so I've got my degree," Shannon said.

"They can give you the credits, but they'll play hell giving the learning," Phil said. "But if you aren't old enough to know your own mind you'll never be."

"Why did you want to do it?" Maggie cried. "Bob's already gone and left for France. One's enough from a family."

"I can't let him and others do my share for me," Shannon told her, but he looked at Phil. "Everybody my age is gone. It's getting so I'm ashamed to walk down the street."

Phil nodded gravely, and Shannon knew and felt warmed that his feelings were understood by his father.

"Chet wanted me to go with him and I would have, except that I had to enroll to get graduation credits. I'd have been a fool not to. By leaving now I'll catch up with him." Shannon saw the corners of Maggie's mouth tighten and intercepted her criticism of his friend. "Don't blame Chet, Mom. I want us to be together through the war as much as he does."

"Most boys who try that get separated sooner or later," Phil said, "but it will be nicer for you both if you can manage it."

Shannon had defended enlistment as far as he cared to and avoided further meeting of Maggie's pleading eyes. He lighted a cigarette and smoked it beside the hearth, gazing into the fire as Phil did. On the way home from school he had made plans to fill the few empty days before him hunting on the river, where he had found the most contented and enjoyable hours of his life; but his thoughts in the kitchen were not of ducks but of Janis and his heart ached with misery of longing. In Manhattan he had hoped she would call him again. He had looked for her about the chemistry hall the first days of classes, telling himself she might have enrolled as she had planned until that last night and her vow not to do so if he did. He had watched everywhere about town for her and whatever a chance meeting might bring. Shannon wondered how she had felt at news of his leaving and his letter saying he was withdrawing while there was time for her to enroll late, that he did not want to stand in her way to graduate research. It seemed now the weakest of excuses for writing her, with an unspoken plea beneath every word for her to see him once more. At the time it had not seemed weakness, and until the last minute he could not believe she would not answer. Home before the family fire he felt ashamed of reducing himself to pleading and scowled in angry satisfaction of thought that she would be feeling the pangs of knowing he was gone.

Suddenly, while ruminating, Shannon felt Phil's gaze keen upon him as if penetrating his thoughts. He saw the cigarette trembling between his fingers, threw it into the ashes and put on a brisk expression.

"You got a skillet and old blankets, Mom? I'm going to camp down at Electra's and shoot ducks till my draft call comes."

"You can't," said Maggie. "You know hunting season has been closed in the spring."

"That's why I'm going." There appeared a glint of stubborn rebellion in Shannon's eyes. "This is *one* time without other hunters bothering; and if a game warden happens along, I'm soon to be in the army anyhow. The Government isn't going to let them take a man out of ranks to stand trial for shooting a duck!"

"It's not right," Maggie protested. "That's Chester Freeman's influence again. He's just like his dad, never does what he ought to like other people. Always against church, too, that family!"

"In this neighborhood, that's a recommendation," Phil said.

Maggie winced.

"A fellow has a right to some fun," Shannon said. He felt no need to

defend his friend. He sensed Maggie's objections arose from her wish to keep him near her these last days and recoiled from prospects of solicitous mothering. If a man had to go to war, there was no use crying. He turned to Phil. "I can only stay through Friday." He hesitated, thinking of his father's inordinate regard for school attendance. "I'd like to have Phillip with me a day. I've promised for so long to take him camping."

"I guess missing a few lessons wouldn't matter too much. I'll bring him down Thursday."

Maggie's mouth dropped open at hearing his permission. Phil smiled slightly at her amazement, and Shannon smiled too, back at him—though in almost as much surprise as his mother.

Arriving that afternoon at the same sheltered spot among willows on the river bank that he and Chet had always chosen, Shannon plunged into the tasks of setting up camp. He raised and staked his tent, gathered firewood, repaired the duck blind. Last, he baited and set two long throwlines for catfish. Everything seemed to take much more than twice as long with no one to help. Dusk had settled when he finished and the afternoon sunshine in which he had worked in shirtsleeves had been replaced by a chill. He built up a good fire and kept it fed for light to cook by and with a green stick raked out embers on which to set coffeepot and frying pan. Shannon had brought eggs and bacon, but only enough for supper, relying for meat thereafter upon gun and fishlines as he and Chet did. "It's more fun to have to work for your grub," Chet had declared. Hungry and busy with his hands, those thoughts which had kept Shannon miserable remained temporarily in the background. But fed and wrapped in his blankets the delicious drowsiness which had always at once overpowered him bedded down on outing trips, tonight failed to come. With determination he fought off remembrances of Janis as they arrived. From now on he'd let her wonder and worry about where he was and what happened to him. Recollections of Chet or Professor Schleicher, however, were not irritation, and his thoughts shifted back and forth from memorable moments in the chemistry laboratory to hunting and fishing incidents, and to the army service before him. He did not want the latter, yet no longer rebelled inwardly or outwardly. What was the use of fighting to shape your life when the biggest thing in it happened to you for nothing?

Shannon tried lying on one side then the other using an arm for a pillow and on his back with interlaced fingers under his head. Inside the tent all was inky black, and after a while the snug contact of blankets against his ribs seemed to be the canvas walls pressing in upon him and the roof in danger of sagging to his face. Intelligence told him it was not so, but

in the sightless darkness when at length he sat up and touched nothing he could not rid himself of the feeling of closure. He had never experienced it before. Shannon hesitated at thought of lighting the kerosene lantern, felt for his shoes and socks and pulled them on. He gathered his blankets under his arm, found his way under the tent flap, and stood up. The night was moonless but starry. He could see a little and it restored his sense of space. Shannon went down to the river. Near the edge on a beach of clean, dry sand he sat down, draping his shoulders with blankets. He drew up his knees under their warmth and propped his elbows on them, chin between hands. He was in the precise spot in which he and Chet had killed their geese that frosty night. The scene came back sharp in detail yet like a miniature far off as though viewed backwards through a telescope. It seemed to Shannon that while the world had remained the same since those thrilling moments, he himself had been steadily changing until at last he was verging upon some great, final transformation. The raw, moist air against his face was like soft hands of a woman with cold fingers holding both his cheeks; yet he did not consciously connect the sensation with Janis. It was too early in spring for frogs and insects, and the night was entirely without sound except for gurgling of the river. He gazed profoundly at the water which emerged as a faint sheen out of nothingness, brightened in front as it flowed past without decision or effort, and disappeared. In a boat one might drift on his back forever under sun and stars. To Shannon in the interval of the thought, such an existence seemed the most desirable in the universe. He lay back and stretched out on the soft sand, blankets drawn in closely and his face toward the stream.

Shannon awakened hours later to a whistling rush of wings low overhead. He opened his eyes on morning gray in the east and stood up at once cramped and chilled. There was no time left for fire and coffee without being late to the blind. At the tent he merely dumped his blankets inside, pulled on wading boots and caught up his shotgun. Visibility was good by the time he got the decoys set. Shannon waited out the first flock through three circles. It paid in the end, Chet had counseled. When on their fourth turn they came in perfectly across the decoys and hovered wings set and yellow feet hanging, Shannon got up and with mechanical precision killed five one by one in as many shots. After reloading he stared at the floating string of dead birds before wading out for them. All his hunting life he had wanted to duplicate this feat he had seen performed by Chet, that of emptying his shotgun without missing. Yet having done so he did not feel the jubilant thrill long anticipated. I'll tell him at camp, Shan-

non said to himself, but he knew with his thought that what he needed was his friend at his side in his moment of accomplishment.

Shannon shot no more. As the sun rose he got out and sat behind the blind, leaning his gun against it. Its willows masked him well in front; and the warming, still reddish rays poured over him. He watched the flocks that came by wheel and circle and splash down among the decoys and, detecting the fraud of the wooden blocks, swim about nervously then take flight again. Across the valley fields of winter wheat were stooled green carpets, and those of early sown oats were tinged with tender, upthrust spears. Shannon opened his hunting coat collar and later unbuttoned the whole front and the sweater beneath. It was too early for such warm weather which had swollen buds on fruit trees, endangering them to late frosts, but Shannon was untroubled by the threat. He lay back on his elbows enjoying the sunshine. He pulled his cap visor part way over his eyes to shade them, and from under it gazed far into the endless blue sky. This was almost as good as the floating he had thought of the night before.

Near noon Shannon dressed one of his ducks and washed it clean in the river. At the tent he rubbed salt and a little pepper into it inside and out. He filled the coffeepot while the fire burned down, then sat beside it in the shade with the duck on a green willow stick over it supported between two crotched stakes. Turned slowly to the heat the bird browned and the fat breast dripped oily juice. Hot in his fingers when done and tangy with wood smoke, Shannon's mouth watered for each bite. He was picking the bones clean, pleasantly full and with a cup of coffee on the ground between his feet when his mind, also relaxed and off guard, recalled a camping trip Janis had told of taking with her father through Minnesota woods. Before he could suppress the vision he saw her in hiking pants and flannel shirt, slender yet rounded, close at his own side. The old hunger, fierce and deep, that no food could satisfy at once possessed him. In Camp Funston he would be but a few miles from her—Shannon sprang up from his comfortable squat. "I won't go," he shouted. "She wouldn't write, and damned if I'll chase after her!" He threw the duck skeleton still in his fingers into the coals and started furiously walking. A hundred yards off quieter thoughts told him he could not run away from the misery within him, yet physical activity gave some relief and for a long while he did not turn back—vigorously tramping the river waste land, determined to exhaust his body for sleep that night without dreams.

Shannon returned to camp in time to meet Phillip that evening. For supper they had fried catfish from the throwlines. Phillip had brought

his air rifle new at Christmas and his entire bag of BB pellets. In company with his little brother and tired out, Shannon felt cleansed and gentle. He smiled and nodded to Phillip's excited anticipations for next morning's hunt. Shannon knew the uselessness of a BB gun for ducks and felt kindly envy of the boy in this and all his games of make-believe which grown-ups could no longer play.

Phillip killed three ducks with Shannon's shotgun next morning and wanted to stay for the evening so badly that they did not break camp until dark. Shannon hoped Maggie would not expect them before morning, but she was waiting up. She smiled through Phillip's account while he filled up on doughnuts baked fresh for them that evening. Shannon ate of them too, but to please her and without much appetite before the ache in her brown eyes whenever they rested upon him. He realized he had hurt her deeply by not being at home more these last days. He wiped the breakfast dishes next morning and all forenoon stayed in the house, teasing her as of old and helping prepare the family farewell dinner. He saw his amends, however much appreciated, building toward a terrible ordeal for her. But once started he did not know how to desist, and he cursed to himself the drawn-out festive scene she must undergo at the station.

Just before noon Phil took Shannon aside into the sitting room. "Mom says after watching Bob she couldn't stand going to the train again—and all that." His voice thickened and spat the last words.

Shannon nodded, wanting to speak tenderly of their mutual concern for his mother, but unprepared for the relief brought by his father's words he was unable to respond.

"I won't go with you either," said Phil. He continued to look at Shannon. "As near as she is to a breakdown, my place is here at home with her. Hal will take you to town. When dinner is over, tell her goodbye and leave. Don't linger."

Shannon nodded again and quickly, still trying to speak and unable to utter a word. For a long, long moment they stood face to face, above them on the wall the family picture and under their feet the old-fashioned, red, plush carpet with flowers still unfaded. Shannon did not try to prevent his blue eyes from blinking tears, for Phil's dark ones were glistening. Shannon felt so near to his father in that instant as to be almost one with him, and when they turned from each other he knew that any speech of his now or before would have been superfluous.

Part VIII Juggernaut

Chapter 54

About the same time Shannon left Plainsboro to join Chet as a recruit for the A.E.F., Ludendorff signed his final orders; and the tremendous avalanche of Germany's spring offensive got underway. Nightly for weeks all along the Picardy sector German guns and supply trucks had lumbered toward the front from railway dumping-off centers. Finally came snorting transport trucks in endless caravans bringing the divisions and last the trample of thousands upon thousands of feet marching into jump-off and support positions.

Under the blow General Gough's British army and then General Byng's were rolled backward. While they were still trying to regroup beyond range of German artillery, a second assault along the Lys River buckled more British lines, throwing the Tommies back upon French reserves rushing up.

Ludendorff's aim was severance of Franco-British contact. His initial attacks did not quite succeed, but the steadfast German general was unshaken from his primary objective. The battered British armies must be cut off against the channel and demolished. However, since depth of penetration necessitated repair of roads and repositioning of batteries, a secondary attack was essential to divert Foch from reinforcing the British. Ludendorff chose the Chemin des Dames sector for its doubly distractive value of imperiling the French capital and cutting roads leading north. Supplies and troops were hurried secretly to that area.

In the midst of the Picardy crisis Pershing offered Foch all his still small accumulation of troops, trained and untrained. No divisions had yet been tried in significant action. Units from a few, like Oscar Karns's company, had occupied quiet sectors of front for intervals, but most of the training of Americans had been in war games far behind lines. Foch was reluctant to commit them into critical battle; yet the problem of French reinforcements for the British had become so acute that Americans had to be used somewhere. The 1st Division was ordered to take over the Can-

tigny front, releasing French veterans. Not long after the 1st went into occupation there, the battle along the Lys came to a standstill, and it was decided the Cantigny salient should be reduced as a combat test of Americans.

Everything was established in that most thorough order possible for small scale attacks. Tanks were assembled. Extra artillery was brought up and an enormous quantity of ammunition amassed. Special batteries of heavy pieces were emplaced to the rear, and the mile and a quarter front sown with dependable little 75's manned by veteran French gunners. French scouts were distributed as advisors among the Americans.

Company C of the 16th Infantry with Oscar Karns acted to reinforce the assaulting 28th regiment. The men moved out of crowded forward dugouts and into the line an hour before dawn. Oscar had been promoted to sergeant, but when he put his third platoon into position to go over with the first wave, his old second squad was closest about him with Anthony Powell now its corporal from Oscar's recommendation.

Down in the deep jumping-off trench complete silence had been ordered. On either side of Oscar as far as glows were visible were red coals of cigarettes, fresh ones lighted constantly off butts. Oscar read the luminous dial of his government wrist watch and thought of what a German barrage would do to the hundreds of waiting troops, and mentally he cursed the eagerness of their officers that had sent them out so long ahead of time. How could they be sure whether the Boche was wise to an attack? The common soldier, poor bastard, had no say; and if the Germans start laying one down, I'm taking my men back to the dugouts till our own bombardment gets going—and God help any officers that try to stop us.

Yet despite distrust of those who gave the commands, Oscar sensed in the guarded hitching and shifting of nearest soldiers the same excitement the officers had shown for their first real attack. They had a hell of a lot to learn. Oscar thought back to San Juan, and as he remembered the blunders there, the unnatural silence of the present moment and the black, cloudy sky brought stifling heaviness into the air that seemed to clog his lungs. But for all his forebodings, he felt a keen, deliberate sense of caution in possession of his mind and body.

Precisely on time and as the first trace of dawn came into the east, the artillery behind let go. The sound seemed to begin in the center and rush both directions as a prolonged crash. With it came the whistling whoosh of light shells low overhead, and a line of explosion flashes leaped up all along the German front. Immediately after came lower pitched rising and fading moan of heavies in high trajectories and more flashes, farther over

and scattered but bigger. A great burst of orange flame arched up and slowly mushroomed down into a red, wavering glare against the sky.

"Jesus!" said George Severns, who was standing with Dale Oakley at Oscar's elbow. "They sure hit something with that one!"

"Fuel dump," Oscar told them. "Ammunition goes up faster."

The seventy-fives went on firing individually after their front-long opening salvo, and the scene to the rear was a flickering panorama of muzzle flashes. Oscar could feel the tension of men around him changing into a kind of overwrought jubilation from certainty the attack had been the surprise intended. They crouched instinctively despite the high wall of sandbags when the first German Very lights rose and burned white over their trench. The uniforms of the soldiers packed into it looked ghostly gray, their shaven faces wax white.

Oscar at once moved along his platoon, speaking into each man's ear. "Put more dirt on your face. Mud hell out of it." By the time he got back to his place the men were becoming accustomed to the eerie glare of flares that came over as regularly as each burned down. They grinned, slapped backs and shouted to each other through the bedlam of shrieking, exploding missiles.

Jake Murphy motioned to the German lines and yelled to the squad. "There'll be nobody left over there for us to fight."

Ahead of any reply the first German shell to their sector landed close in front, and all ducked with the explosion. Dirt rained over the parapet, and when they stood up again, little Toby Livengood dusted off his uniform. "Private Murphy reports the Boche all dead, corporal," he said to Anthony. There were unnaturally loud guffaws.

As misty daylight continued to filter in, the flares burned with less dazzling brilliance. The flashes of guns became less sharp as did shell bursts, and along the German trench system and behind it fires of burning supply dumps and buildings grew less bright through the mist becoming more and more mixed with smoke. The return fire seemed to have been swamped, and still the artillerymen behind fed shells into their guns. Oscar saw men with hands over their ears. His own were ringing and aching.

Lt. Smith worked his way along the platoon, slapping men's shoulders. He stopped beside Oscar. "Everything is going exactly according to plan, sergeant!"

"Yes, sir," said Oscar.

"We've got ten more minutes," Smith said. "Check your watch again with mine." They held their wrists together.

"It's right on the second, sir," Oscar said.

After Smith passed on, Oscar felt tension of excitement mount again.

Up and down the trench visibility had become good, and men craned necks, looking about at comrades. On every face was the same expression, a tight grin. Fingers checked and rechecked rifles, tightened helmet straps under chins. Some men moistened mouths from canteens.

Oscar felt the cotton dryness he remembered from San Juan thicken his tongue and throat. But he did not grip and regrip his rifle as he had then. He left it slung bayonet fixed behind his shoulder, where he could feel its good weight on the leather strap. His teeth were so tightly shut under his cheeks that his jaw muscles bulged. He stood straight and motionless, watching his men. Powell was putting a borrowed butt to fresh cigarette. Oscar noted his steady fingers. Tony was a good man, the right one for corporal. Jake Murphy stroked the cartridge drum of the French Chauchat he carried as automatic rifleman, and began to hum softly an Irish air. Davidson fumbled a hand continuously over the row of grenades hanging from his belt. Wycoff looked at the blades of his heavy wire cutters and worked the handles.

"I wonder if we'll get leaves back to Paris after we take this place?" Toby asked generally, turning his face one way and the other after the question. Nobody answered, but his words brought Oscar thought of dim, drowsy safety in Monsieur Reaumur's dance café and he held his mind there on good food and secure warmth of fine liquor.

Lt. Smith mounted the sand bag wall to the embankment and crouched, wrist watch turned to his eyes. Oscar unslung his rifle.

The tone of bombardment changed with shell bursts receding. Right and left to the rear Oscar heard a roar of tank engines. A last moment of waiting, a breath-stifling one, and Lt. Smith rose with a wave of arm. "Let's go, men. Over the top!" He vaulted the parapet.

Oscar went up the wall with the first massed surge. He used his rifle as a climbing crutch. When he emerged on both sides as far as he could see men were milling in confusion before the maze of wire that for two hundred yards had escaped the shells, and behind them more soldiers were swarming out of the trench. Before them scattered French scouts were picking their ways through singly, side-stepping and passing around tangles; and out beyond the flat slope of bluffs where the first German lines had been, artillery shells were falling into the valley, still misty beneath a streaked layer of slow-drifting smoke. There was no rifle fire. Wycoff stepped past Oscar, dropped on one knee and began cutting wires. Jake crowded up beside him, stamping his big shoes at strands nearest the ground.

All that Oscar absorbed in a glance and still looked about him. Other cutting crews went to work, officers dashed back and forth waving their arms, and Lt. Smith was shouting: "Reorganize in the clear." To left and

right of C Company, tanks passed through the infantry and began butting passage. Men fell in after them in crowds. Oscar wished fleetingly that his sector had drawn a tank, and at the same time the thought registered upon him that the French scouts had got through and gone. From over on his right front where ravines cut the slope bluffs came the clatter of a machine gun. Soon they might be shelled. Oscar ran to Wycoff down the short alley he had opened and kicked the cutters out of his hands. "Drop those damned things and come on!" He leaped the remains of the first tangle and went on, twisting and turning, winding about, finding lanes and holes. Behind him he heard running men swearing and tearing free when clothing caught, and before him on both sides tank-led infantry crossed the first German trenches unopposed.

In the relative clear of shelled wire he motioned down and threw himself flat. Men flopped on stomachs around him, and he saw that only his old squad had followed. The rest of the platoon with Lt. Smith were hardly half way through and still cutting wire. To the left with the first platoon, Captain Danvers was directing the unrolling of wire netting over entanglements. Then over among the ravines from which the machine gun had been firing, colored signal rockets rose, followed by the whistling rush of overhead shells that began bursting all along the company sector. Men turned and fled back, diving into the trench they had left.

Oscar raised his head a little and looked about at the squad. There was no getting back, and the eyes of all were upon him.

"Our best chance is the Boche trench if it's empty," he told them.

"If it ain't, we'll empty it!" Jake said. The others nodded, gripping their rifles.

Oscar felt a surge of pride. These were his men. Smith could have the rest of the platoon. He drew arms and legs under his body for a spring and waited till the others had done the same. "Keep low and scattered," he said and leaped up. Under shells passing overhead they charged abreast in a ragged line through the German defense zone, torn and pocked by the seventy-fives, their bodies hunched over bayoneted rifles. The first trench had been reduced to a flattened ditch by the bombardment. Oscar jumped into it for what protection it still offered. Yelling at the men to follow, he turned right past a pair of German boots sticking up through shattered sand bags and headed for better cover of the nearest ravine. There a French soldier rose before them, waving his arms.

"Ma—sheen gun," he shouted, pointing still farther along their right front. "It has been signalling a l'artillerie."

As the squad ran after him down the ravine more rockets rose and shelling ceased. The Frenchman slowed to a walk. "They are saving shells

and keeping their battery hidden," he said. His gaze centered on the stripes on Oscar's sleeve. "When your men try to come out of the trench again they will call for more fire."

Halfway down the slope of bluffs the ravine joined a second. As they approached the tip of wedge-shaped ridge between the two, the French soldier dropped on hands and knees. After a few yards he stopped under a steep bank where bushes and grass along the crest had escaped shells. "I show you from here," he said.

All the squad moved to climb the bank, faces suddenly keen with excitement. "I've never seen a Boche nest," Toby said.

Oscar motioned him back. "You keep your damned head down, and the rest of you, too." Like the Frenchman he removed his helmet and plastered his sweat streaked face with new dirt. "Okay, Napoleon." Side by side they crept high enough to peer through bushes. The French scout put his hand on Oscar's shoulder and squeezed.

"Half way up the second bluff, sergeant, in the first trees."

Oscar looked long and carefully at the motionless tangle of shell-torn vegetation and then down into the valley. Supporting artillery fire had ceased because of the depth of the advance. On both sides in front came sounds of rifle shots and grenades. He nudged the French soldier, and they slid back to his waiting squad.

"I spotted the damned thing," Oscar told them. "It's dug in so deep under bushes it would take a mortar to blast it out."

"We can surround it and stop their signals to the artillery battery while we send for help," the French soldier said.

Before Oscar could reply all whirled at footsteps and saw Lt. Smith heading the platoon in running file down the ravine.

"Christ!" Jake gasped. "They passed that low spot in plain sight."

"The Boche wants a better chance," the Frenchman said. "He is good at waiting." He stepped back respectfully at the officer's hustling approach, and stood gazing curiously at the energetic newcomers.

Lt. Smith stopped beside Oscar. He was breathing hard. "We scattered and got through the same way you did, sergeant. We've got to find and stop that battery so the rest of the company can get forward."

Oscar told him of the machine gun. "It's got us blocked, sweeps the slopes ahead all the way into the valley."

"How did our right flank get past?"

"I don't know. Napoleon found the gun."

The Frenchman stepped forward. He waved a hand indicating a wide arc of deviation. "They went around. The officer was in a great hurry. I, Nicolas, stayed to warn you. We should send for a tank."

Smith gave him a look. "We don't have time." He turned again to Oscar. "Show it to me."

"You can't see much except the bushes it's hid in."

"Well, show me the bushes."

Before they could move to climb the bank, men appeared on the sharp edge of bluffs to their right front and started down the grassy slope. The machine gun came to life with a clatter, sending several head over heels and the rest scurrying back again. In the ravine the men ducked with the noise and looked guiltily at one another.

Nicolas gave the incident but a brief glance. "We could also gather many rifles and automatic rifles and silence it by crossfire," he said.

"Hell, that might take an hour!" Smith motioned him aside. "Stretch out along the ridge, boys, and follow me. Come on, Sergeant. We'll take 'em out of there!" He crawled up to the crest. Oscar crept up behind him but stopped and lay flat with only his head raised a little, watching Smith take a look and draw his legs up under him.

"Forward!" Smith leaped and was hit by a burst of fire as he rose. Instead of following Oscar ducked and slammed his hand down upon the back of Anthony Powell's head as he started to pass, pressing Anthony's face into the earth away from the sweep of bullets that ripped grass and bushes close above. When Oscar, still holding Powell down, raised his head again to look, the action before him finished within seconds. Those men who had started off with Smith's command tried to keep going against a hail of dirt and ricochets flying up before them and fell in their tracks. Jake was the last to go down. He got up again, drawing more fire as he staggered back for safety. His big body shook with each new impact, but physical desperation kept him moving. He tumbled over the ridge with blood pouring from his throat.

Lt. Smith had slumped backward and rolled into the ravine, but he was on his feet again, leaning against the bank clutching his chest. Oscar released Powell and slid down beside Smith.

"Is it bad, sir?"

"I don't know." Smith turned his face dazedly from side to side. "Maybe—the—Frog—was—right—" He coughed suddenly, spitting up blood and froth and collapsed.

Smith was dead. Oscar knew that without examining him, as he had known it for Jake when he reached and tumbled back into the ravine. Oscar took one look at the men crowding about the bodies, faces white and eyes wide in horrified disbelief at this first contact with battle death. "Those dirty bastards," said Anthony. His face grew ugly with sudden rage and he turned by reflex toward the machine gun nest.

Oscar's shoulders straightened and stiffened. I take command. The thought seemed to come to him from without and course through his body. "Hold it, you!" he bellowed to Powell. "All of you hold it." He drew himself back up the bank and cautiously surveyed the field.

The men who had gone over the ridge were all down. Little Toby had dropped close by, spinning as he fell so that he faced backward. He lay on his stomach exactly as Oscar had seen him land, but he was not dead. Oscar could see his eyes blink regularly. Toby's face was white and sweat streamed over it as with clinched hands and teeth he resisted temptation to move, which would bring another burst of fire upon him. While Oscar looked at him their gazes met, and Oscar called out softly, automatically, "We'll get you, boy." He felt no compassion at Toby's desperately pleading eyes. Humaneness had been blunted in his soul by hard discipline of old Ezra Karns, so that he was without emotion to interfere with clear, swift action of mind. I take command, he thought again, and inheriting a command at such a moment was the right stimulus for his unconscious craving for distinction. He slid back enough below the ridge crest for safety and turned himself on an elbow. His chin jutted and his thick jaws bulged as he threw his voice at the dazed and confused men below. "Corporal Powell, take half the men up to the tip of the ravine and get set. Severns, take the rest down the ravine fifty yards. You will cover Powell with all the fire you got for his start and go over yourselves when his men flop. Cover each other. Keep scattered and shoot like hell!"

Severns nodded, parted the clustered men into two groups. Anthony knelt swiftly, slipped the sling of the automatic rifle from Jake's shoulders and over his own. The weapon was bloody. Powell straightened the dead man's uniform before he rose. He stood up with his face strangely white beneath the eyes and his shaven lips drawn away beast-like from his teeth. "Gotcha, sarg." He ran with a squad for the ridge tip without another word; and even Nicolas, aroused now, trotted after Severns and his men.

Oscar sent Anthony over with a sweep of his arm. When the second group went also, he himself sprang upright. A lone, huge figure in plain, stationary view he stood waving his units forward. Once a short spray of bullets spattered near him, but the machine gunners concentrated upon the real threat of the assaulting soldiers.

The squad led by Severns had advantage of torn ground. In singles and doubles Oscar saw them rise in forward hurtles, now plunging but a few feet, again several yards, guided by points of cover.

The higher slope had less concealment. One by one the men failed to rise after Anthony, until he was advancing alone. Oscar watched him crouch motionless back of the white slivered stump of what had that morn-

ing been a tree. One great leafy branch had fallen sidewise to the right, and up the slope to Anthony's right front the machine gun's location was clearly marked behind bushes by steam emitted under heat of intensive firing. Anthony began worming slowly along behind the branch, body flattened to earth. Forward, across bare ground at a tangent to his right was a crater where a 155 had buried itself.

"He could hit the damned nest good from there but he can't make it," Oscar heard himself say aloud. Anthony paused at the tip of the branch, drew hands and knees up under him and waited for a burst of fire on Severns's men. Oscar waved to them fiercely and several sprang up. At the first shots upon them Oscar himself charged. He knew he would draw fire, knew instinctively when the barking gun swung his way; and he crumpled clutching his stomach with the first bullets near him. Oscar lay as if dead until the machine gun changed direction then twisted his face toward Anthony in time to see him in a desperate leap fall head first into the crater with dirt flying up along the rim. He lay still for a moment. Then Oscar saw him pull up a sleeve and examine one arm, and get to his knees. He wiped his hands, inspected the muzzle of the rifle, and crawled carefully up the side of the crater.

The nest was silent but steam was rising from the bushes. Oscar watched Anthony methodically put into practice the things he had taught him. He pushed the heavy weapon into position, pulled the sling down tight; for the clumsy old Chauchat was apt to scatter over a five-foot circle. He lined his sights solidly.

Now you'll get it, you sons-of-bitches, thought Oscar.

Some of Severns's men got on the move again, and the machine gun clattered. Anthony squeezed the trigger in answer, and Oscar saw the muzzle rise a little into the air with a brief pounding of the automatic rifle. The machine gun ceased. Anthony fired another burst and another. It was cheering to Severns's men who kept moving. There came a shouting and trample of many feet. Khaki forms poured over the bluffs and down the slope, dozens of them yelling and firing—flank Americans coming to aid. A grenade landed before the nest, ripping aside bushes so that Oscar could see the structure of timber and earth set back low into the slope. A man crawled out, hands upraised. Someone shot him as he stood up. Scattered grenades landed all about the front opening. One rolled inside, and the whole dugout seemed to bounce on its foundation.

Oscar arose and went back quickly to Toby Livengood, stooped and saw that the boy soldier lay now with eyelids lax open in death. God damn it. If the little fool had watched me instead of the lieutenant. Oscar looked toward Anthony and saw him try to rise, but his legs seemed un-

able to hold him so that he sank back. He tried again, got up to the rim of the hole and sat down.

"Are you hit, Tony?" Oscar shouted.

Anthony did not answer. Oscar ran to him and the first thing he saw was a seam of blood running down onto his hand and clotting on his fingers. Oscar knelt beside him and slit the sleeve up to the little hole through the muscles of the brown forearm.

Anthony gazed almost wonderingly at the wound. "It doesn't hurt," he said. "It doesn't hurt at all."

Oscar ripped open his first aid pack without reply, spread the compress to cover both ends of the puncture and wrapped it tight. Then he stood up and extended his hand. Anthony caught it with his good one, and Oscar could feel strength flowing back into Powell's shaking limbs as he pulled him to his feet. They seemed to become aware simultaneously of the sounds of furious fighting carried to them from down the valley, and of an officer shouting at the bewildered men around the dugout to reform. Oscar stooped, picked up the Chauchat, and held it out. Anthony took it and slung it with precision behind his shoulder. Corporal and sergeant, they started forward side by side. Before them they saw the smoking ruins of a village to be cleared—and beyond that in months of time and miles of distance through which no one could see were the Salient of St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne.

Chapter 55

So insignificant was the operation at Cantigny that it would have passed as an incident, except that for morale purposes Allied commanders hailed it as a great American success. It did not interfere in the least with Ludendorff's purpose. Machinery for his diversionary blow at the Chemin des Dames sector was massed and ready primed. At one o'clock the very next morning the battle opened according to Hutier tactics and with the most perfectly devastating artillery preparation on a vast scale the world had known.

The German staff had planned no penetration in depth. They expected no strong resistance, yet neither Ludendorff nor his counsellors suspected the extreme vulnerability of the area. Here again chance and the spirit of the soldiers featured as principles of higher importance in battle than strategy. Lightly defended by a few battered and dejected French and British units sent to Chemin des Dames as a quiet sector for rest, the whole doomed front—such as was left of it when the bombardment shifted to a

rolling barrage—caved in under the first assaulting waves. Through the gap poured an avalanche riding its own momentum. By the end of the first day the Aisne River had been crossed and the situation of both Rheims and Soissons made critical.

The German army was almost as badly unbalanced by the ease of advance as was the opposition. It was like an all-star quarterback lunging for a feather. German staff officers were further dazzled by successes attending flank offensives on the second day. For the first time Ludendorff let his veteran judgment be shaken; he allowed himself to be swayed by counsel of staff into cancelling plans for returning to the unfinished English at Lys and Picardy and to settle upon the Chemin des Dames area for the major operation.

It is always a handicap to change plans in the midst of battle. Supplies and reinforcements massing on the Picardy front had to be shifted southward. At the same time the wedge at Chemin des Dames must be widened at the base, the advantage of attack ceaselessly pressed. And it was pressed. The Germans called it in its continuation their "peace storm."

In four days they had crossed the Marne. Disorder of retiring refugees and troops and lack of veterans at hand, compelled Foch to resort to unproven cannon fodder. The nearby American 2nd Division was ordered out of billets and set on forced march. Its ranks were deployed across the Paris to Metz highway before Belleau Wood, to halt the onrushing green clad flood and if possible to club it backward. Weary French retired through the American lines.

Four thousand miles away across an ocean and half a continent in Camp Funston, Kansas, Shannon and Chet felt the impact of the defeats at Picardy, the Lys, and Chemin des Dames. Out of Washington came rush orders to complete training of the 89th. Furlough requests were refused, and soldiers on leave summarily recalled. No more weekend passes were issued, and discipline became suddenly again iron handed.

"I thought we were past the worst of their crap after basic and they started treating us more like human beings," Chet complained, bitter with disappointment. "It don't make sense to go back to pouring it on." Chet was one of those to have his furlough revoked.

"It's an accident when the army does make sense," Shannon said.

They were in from bayonet drill, sitting sweaty and tired on their bunks, the whole company restricted to quarters for further orders. Shannon and Chet, because of their knowledge of the outdoors, were being trained as scouts and runners. Yet that freedom of field and streams they loved and which the army was utilizing made military life especially loathsome with

its regimentation. It had seemed to Shannon during basic, the most miserable interval in a soldier's life, that he had not known how happy he had been outside and that all the freedoms he had taken for granted were the most wonderful values in the world. The taste of liberty after basic withheld again looked like a plot by those in command to afflict those in ranks and had set all the men to grumbling. Shannon saw everything he felt reflected in Chet, who sat staring dejectedly at the floor. The future must seem unendurable to him. It appeared more bearable to Shannon only in that cancellation of weekend passes settled his stubborn struggle not to go back to Janis.

"If I were you," said Chet, at length looking up, "I'd use that SATC college training to get transferred into that Officer's Training Camp over at Fort Riley and be one of those bastards yourself."

In the advice which meant separation Shannon felt again the rebellion in his heart in Chet's also, and a bondage in misery came into the grin with which he shook his head. "I don't want to be no damned ninety-day wonder."

"It couldn't help being better than what you are."

"They wouldn't recommend me now anyway. They'd want to know why I didn't report a college education in the first place and maybe end up making me corporal with extra work. The best way to live in this army is to be dumb and do only what you're told, and I'm going to be the dumbest man in here."

The agreement in Chet's face to Shannon's words vanished with appearance of Sergeant Grady's bull shoulders in the barracks doorway. Everybody scrambled to attention expecting an officer with him, but Grady was alone. "Prepare for night maneuvers, full packs," he bellowed. "Scouts and runners to the orderly room for instructions. On the double!"

Shannon and Chet looked at each other wryly and trotted out of the building. There would be no sleeping again that night. Behind them they heard groans and curses issuing from the barracks.

The rugged life of concentrated training through succeeding weeks was not physically severe for farm youths like Chet and Shannon. But hands that had grown soft behind clothing store counters and soda fountains blistered and cracked to bleeding before they calloused. By regiments the infantry dug opposing trench systems in the valley and among prairie hills and ravines of the reservation and probed each other's defenses. Shannon and Chet scouted positions, sneaked and knifed dummy pickets. Troops strung wire entanglements in pitch darkness. They learned to flop and lie still while flares rose and burned. They were taught how to take down

and reassemble rifles and machine guns blindfolded. Grenade throwing, range shooting and bayonet drills became routine. Companies built and lived in dugouts and trenches. There were night raids and attacks in force, through clouds of real gas.

The countryside was never silent from echoing thunder of three and five-inch guns, and the whining little bark of one pounders. Motorized detachments lumbered twenty-four hours a day over seemingly impassable roads and bridges rebuilt by engineers after they had been deliberately blasted to pieces. The 353rd all Kansas regiment marched miles and miles and more miles.

Amid shortening days and nights occasionally touched with hint of autumn, the 89th received orders of transfer to the coast for shipment overseas. The full division maneuvered in shambattle prior to departure, and a month's supply of ammunition was fired in forty-eight hours.

Shannon, as a dispatch runner, got a good concept of the battle as a whole. For the first time he witnessed the confusion and disorder inevitable in large-scale military operations. He saw bewildered companies lost and impeding one another, and learned of orders miscarried and of runners never arriving. But the bluffs and meadow hills were black with men, and it seemed that Germany could not last long assailed by such numbers.

On the final day the division was reviewed by General Wood and inspecting generals. Platoon and company officers had difficulty keeping lines dressed on the parade ground, and the waves were ragged as they rolled past the stands. But there was good band music for keeping time, and the men stepped out and did their best—which was decidedly good for boys such a few months out of fields and towns.

The troops were to entrain in the early evening, and Shannon and Chet took their habitual places side by side when their platoon was called up for departure roll call. Chet answered with ready promptness and Shannon had his mouth open to say "Here" when only his first and middle names were announced. It surprised him and he hesitated.

Sergeant Grady reared back and blared repetition: "John Shannon?"

Shannon made a flourishing gesture, then dropped his hand remembering he was at attention. "Maybe that's me," he blurted.

"Is your name John Shannon?"

"No, but—"

"Then shut up till it's called." Grady entered a notation on the roll sheet. "Benjamin Russel Gordon."

"Here."

Shannon felt the warm blood that had risen in his neck seethe upwards

heating his face. From his side came a slightest of slight hitch, and from Chet a faint: "Tee-hee, tee-hee-hee."

Low as was the sound it somehow reached the ears of Sergeant Grady. His head turned on his thick neck as if swiveled. "What the hell are you laughin' at? Do you want KP all the way to Europe!"

"No, *sir!*" Chet put quick, respectful emphasis on the missapplied title.

"Then keep your trap still, and don't ever say sir to me again. And lift up that chin!"

Chet stiffened his neck until muscles ridged. "Yes, Sergeant."

As soon as the men were dismissed to barracks for their equipment, Shannon went directly to the orderly room. The offices were in a confusion of strange personnel getting established for the flood of recruits already coming in for the next division. He waited a few minutes, left, and hurried in search of his own officers. The first he saw was his company commander. Captain Rayburn was already wearing his musette bag and had a folder of papers under his arm. He was in hurried conference with a strange colonel, and Shannon waited respectfully aside until he was able to catch the captain's eye; then he stepped forward, saluted and stood at attention. He was cutting across regular military channels and did not know exactly what to say, so he simply gave his name: "I am Private Shannon Garwood, sir."

Rayburn returned the salute compulsorily. "Did you wish to speak to me, private?"

"Yes, sir. I think there's been a mistake made in my name."

"Report it to Sergeant Grady."

"I have, sir, but—"

"Then it will be taken care of."

"But, sir, I—"

Captain Rayburn looked sharply at him, through him, and over him. "I said it would be taken care of, private!"

Shannon felt his throat and cheeks burn once more until his ears tingled. He drew himself up stock stiff and saluted again. "*Yes, sir!*" He did an about face and marched off toward his barracks.

The nearer Shannon got to his quarters the more furious he became. His independent disposition long persecuted by army discipline had never before been insulted at such an inopportune moment. During the review he had been caught up in the massive spectacle of division strength, conscious and proud of his snarling wolverine shoulder patch that made him part of it. Under influence of the music and color of the parade he had felt gay in marching with the best of his comrades, and never once lost step. Now his pleasure of the day had been killed. Should he try to go with his

outfit or stay behind? He was certain to be bawled out either way sooner or later and felt he would explode under any punishment from bullying Sergeant Grady. He thought of Janis. To hell with her, too, he told himself in his anger, and at the same time remembered autumn near and that soon she would be re-enrolled in nearby Kansas State.

When he reached his barracks Chet had Shannon's canvas overseas bag packed for him and was sitting waiting on the edge of his bunk. The other men had already left to fall in, and the floor was littered with discarded debris. Chet rose at once. "We'll have to hurry."

Shannon sat down and looked at him. "I'm staying here."

Chet's mouth and eyes gaped wide. "Is that what they said?"

"They didn't say anything. I tried to tell the captain, and he told me I didn't know who the hell I was. All right, to hell with him! It's their damned mistake. Let them straighten it out in France."

"I don't know whether you can get away with it, Shan."

"Why can't I? You know my name was never called on the roll to go, and that I reported it. You can vouch for that when they get around to checking me and other men will too." An almost savage grin of satisfaction lighted Shannon's freckled face. "Grady'll catch the hell this time. By God, for once a private has beaten the army."

Chet looked at him a long moment. "You lucky devil!" he cried at last. "You'll be waiting around home while we're getting shot at. If you fell in the river you'd come up with your pockets full of fish!"

Shannon grinned more broadly than ever. "I'll see you off from here," he said. "If I go with you to the station, their checking might start right then."

Chet shouldered his bag. They shook hands, concealing from their faces like soldiers the desolate sinking in both their hearts at separation.

Chapter 56

Shannon told himself for consolation on Chet's departure that they might not have been able to stay together much longer. He had a lush time, left behind in Camp Funston, unnoticed in the deluge of new trainees for the 10th Division. Since his name was nowhere on the new rolls he had no work or drill. He could go back to his bunk after reveille, except that alone and staring at the ceiling he made himself miserable with thoughts of Janis. He fell in with the handiest mess line at chow call and on rainy days read in the post library. The bright autumn-like afternoons he fished in the Kaw River which ran through a camp area for

off-duty enlisted men. Among them Shannon felt safe from inquisitive officers.

I could take a trip home, he told himself one afternoon as he lay sunning, watching his cork bobber. I could get hold of a permanent party pass, and be gone a week, and they'd never know the difference. The welcome he would get and the fried chicken and cake tantalized him. Yet he hesitated to risk extended absence from camp. There would be a check-up sooner or later which would catch him, and not to be present then would be desertion. On the other hand there would be little danger in a few hours to Manhattan and back among crowds of soldiers. That trip had tempted him whenever he thought of Janis, as he did now alone in her big, heavy house. His love more and more resisted remembering the finality with which she had dismissed him and fled from the room in parting. He sought out earlier, happier moments to dwell and enlarge upon; and he saw her with face upturned for their kiss at the pep rally dance and after that the picture she made in the moonlight before her door, saying against her will: "Yes, I will see you off on the streetcar."

Then Shannon felt all the abandonment in her surrender to their last embrace, burrowing her cheek into his breast—"one last moment—a kiss to remember." Her confession which had led to that embrace. "How could I know you would ever come!" Pressure rose in his chest as he lay on the river bank thinking, and he ached miserably. What would she say if he went to see her now?

Shannon rolled over on his elbows, trying to break free of anticipations of another meeting, trying to regain a mood of anger against her. His fingers trembled as he rolled a cigarette and inhaled drag after drag. He had no right to seek her. Yet left behind his comrades it seemed as if a meeting had been fated. Over and over pride told him that to go to her again would be cheap and weak, and reason said that only disaster could come from their companionship—that he must cease thinking of her. Yet he had been unable to suppress thoughts; and each time his judgment counselled him, he realized he had weakened, until now he knew surely he did not have the will power and that eventually he would go to her.

Shannon threw away his cigarette and stood up to take in his fish line. Since going was inevitable, it might as well be today. The skin of his face felt tightly drawn, but within him there was now exhilaration instead of foreboding.

Doubts returned to Shannon on the evening trolley, and the nearer he got the more his trepidation grew. Janis might not be home, could even

have gone away. He felt both relief and alarm at the thought. If gone, that would settle it, and he hoped she had gone and hoped she had not. He smoked one tailor-made cigarette after another.

As the car entered city outskirts Shannon felt almost a nausea from suspense; and at his corner his hand shook as he pulled the signal cord. He got off and walked up the familiar street toward the campus and cut across it. The walks were darker there and deserted with only an occasional lamp shining among the elms, oaks and sycamores. He passed between ivy-covered, limestone buildings and looked up at one, Garwood Hall. The chemistry laboratory windows were all black, but the thought occurred that if Janis was not home he might call upon Professor Schleicher. A little farther on he could see down the campus hill to scattered faculty residences beyond, and there was a light where she lived. Again the hollow fright he had felt the other time he had gone to call on her there filled him. As he approached near he saw only one light was burning, that in the study room behind shades. Shannon threw away his cigarette, and his steps became clumsily faster as if he were being pushed from behind. He straightened his hat brim as he went up the steps. He squared his shoulders, rang the bell, and stepped back. There he waited as stiff and miserably tense as if at attention before a general.

A moment and light, quick steps moved inside and approached. The living room lit up. Janis opened the door, and the light fell fully upon him from campaign hat to puttees and soldier's shoes.

Janis's back was to the light, and Shannon could not see her face distinctly, but he heard an inarticulate sound rise from her throat. Her whole body stiffened and swayed as if she struggled to move forward with her feet anchored. Then she pronounced his name in two separate syllables, each almost a little cry; and as he moved toward her she did what he had pictured in his dreams. She ran to meet his advance with outstretched arms, clutched him with all her might, kissing him back on his mouth and pressing his cheeks with both her hands. An instant later she had drawn him quickly inside and closed the door; and for a long moment they stood face to face, holding each other's hands and looking at each other with her eyes shining into his. Without speech they stepped again into an embrace, and Shannon kissed her lips and cheeks and eyes over and over and over, and finally buried his face in her hair. He became aware of the world and their surroundings as slowly and gently she started to draw away, and involuntarily and powerfully he retained her for an instant more. Then he let her go, saying after her with arms still extended, "Janis, Janis, I love you!"—without knowing what he said. And she answered with words torn from her: "I wish I were free!"

The clock ticked loud on the mantel in the silence which followed. Only barriers of convention had ever stood between them, and the bars had fallen. Shannon knew it from the happiness and relief which came slowly into her face. He noticed how strained that face had become since their last meeting; and he felt a stab of pain from her tiredness and thinness, and then a quieting gladness that she had resisted with all her power. He drew a long, quivering breath. "We can't stay here," he said gravely.

Janis gave him a look full of appreciation of his understanding of her position here in the house of a man she was bound to and respected. "I'll get the key to the car," she said.

They went out through the kitchen to the garage back of the house. The top was down on the Buick, and she told Shannon to drive.

"Where to? Or does it matter?"

"It doesn't matter at all."

He smiled. "We'd rather just ride and talk, wouldn't we?"

She nodded. After they had ridden for a few moments she said: "I thought you were gone to France."

Shannon told her briefly of the mistake made with his name on the army rolls. "That's the only reason I am still here, but I'm trained and ready to be shipped whenever they do find me."

"I knew your division had left," she said. "I went to Funston to inquire when I couldn't stand it here alone and thinking of you. That was why it was such a shock when you came. I thought I would never see you again."

"I should have come sooner," he said. "I wanted to, but I was a coward."

"I was too," she said. "It took me all these weeks to face up to it, that I should never have sent you away."

Shannon took a hand from the steering wheel and gave hers a hard but gentle squeeze. "Darling!"

They left town behind and drove slowly along country highways up and down and winding through the steep, limestone flint hills of pasture grassland, until Shannon turned off onto a meadow trail and stopped where it ended on a small plateau and the cliff dropped almost sheer to the level of a little glen.

Without speaking he switched off the lights.

The heavens were free above them, and the moon dim and encompassed by a bright circle of haze. Across the narrow valley the hills lay motionless in gray-dark contour against the horizon; and from beyond them at Funston came the cannonading of light guns, like short claps of far-

off thunder. Close to the car the breeze stirred and rustled the dry blue-stem warmly and softly.

They were sitting apart, and Shannon turned his face toward Janis. She was gazing at him, and her countenance seemed lacking of color, making her eyes look big and vacant.

"What are you thinking of, sweetheart?" he asked. She did not answer. "You look so strange," he said.

She shook her head mutely. Neither moved toward the other, and Shannon took out his cigarettes. He smoked in silence.

Presently the firing ceased. Distant rockets rose in bright colors, and then the guns commenced again.

"It's artillery night. They're practicing range signals," Shannon said.

Janis shivered. "I'll tell you what I was thinking," she said almost hoarsely. "Of how soon you will be going away again—to that!"

"Shucks, I'll come back."

"It'll be months or even years you'll be gone. Suppose we—shouldn't ever see each other any more!"

"Shucks, I'll come back," Shannon said again. Something within him seemed to melt at the loneliness, the love and the longing in her words. He put out his hand and touched her hair, and pressed his fingers into it to still their trembling. She whirled fiercely into his arms. They kissed and kissed, pressing and clutching as if to engulf one another. Their passion became quieter after the first moments, then mounted again with their kisses constant and deep—until at length Shannon tore his mouth away. He spoke almost roughly. "Right now I could still take you home, but if we stay here like this—Janis, do you want to go?"

"No," she said.

After a while they got mutually from the car without releasing hands. "I can hear the brook," she said.

With arms around each other's waists they walked past the cliff and down a crooked path of the bluff to the stream where it flowed over pebbles between bluegrass banks. In darkness under the trees they halted to kiss and walked on in the same fashion beside the stream. They stopped where a parting in the trees left the night open overhead, and stood with shoulders touching and gazed and listened to the gentle gurgling of the water and to the trilling of frogs and chirping of late summer insects. There was not light enough for the brook to sparkle, only a lighter surface moving along smoothly like soft-flowing silk. It seemed to Shannon as if they were merging with the big, dusky night earth.

Janis turned and faced him, still within his encircling arm. "I'll love you always. You know that?"

"Yes."

He lifted her from her feet and laid her down, holding her against any release as if guarding the warm, soft, slender body.

Lying with her on the thick grass, resting on his elbows half over her, Shannon felt Janis's fingers reach up and open his soldier's shirt. "It's such rough cloth," she whispered.

"You're so small it would almost button around both of us," he said.

Janis brushed his bare chest with her lips, and goose pimples tingled his skin. She turned sidewise out of his arms before he could clasp her, and in a quick minute of rustling movements while he watched with breath catching in his throat, her dress and slip passed over her head. He sat up and with trembling, bungling fingers worked to remove his own clothes. When he turned back the entirety of her lay dimly revealed in the uncertain moonlight. Shannon put out shaking hands to the swellings of her breasts, and at touch of their roundness to his palms he jerked away again.

"If I— You—you're so soft!" He gazed almost in terror at the mystery of her and dropped his face into the crook of her arm. "Don't let me be rough with you," he pleaded.

Janis put her other arm over him and her lips to his ear. "I want you to be, a little." She moved close and lay with breasts lightly against him.

He looked down at them, lowered his face to them and into the warm hollow between them. She caught his head then, forcing it hard into her. He could feel the nipples rising and stiffening and pressing into his cheeks. When she released his head, he raised it and put his lips to her lips and stroked the length of her body into the curve of her slim waist above the hip. She drew him over and on to her; and his hands slid under her—palms supporting her to him yet with his weight held away.

"Gentle—so gentle." The words came slowly, murmured by her, and then, quickly, involuntarily and deep from within her: "Shannon! Shannon, Shannon—oh, darling!" With her arms still about him her hands pressed into his back, and she kissed him again and again. After that she did not speak and lay as if not daring to move.

Shannon looked wildly into her eyes, wide open and dark in the outline of her face. She lay with head tilted back and her lips sealed into his every time he touched them. His mind began to swim with two words repeating within his brain: be gentle—be gentle. The earth, trees, sky melted away. He felt suspended with Janis in the strength of her arms that crushed him upon her with hands sliding down his back and spread fingers clutching uncontrollably into his flesh. Deep-seated violence burst and struggled within her body, thrusting them aloft. There were no more

words in his brain, no Janis or himself, only portions of them both mounting interwoven and blending, borne away together on waves—then nothing at all.

Awareness came back to Shannon slowly as from afar. Janis's upheld body was sagging on his hands, and he lowered it gently, following down with his own. There was no sound from her except catching, irregular breathing and no movement save sharp, spasmodic throbs within her body. He saw the pallor of her face, turned now on one side, and the first thought he knew was of fright for her.

"Oh, my God, did I hurt you!"

"Oh no—no!" She raised her hands lying inert at her sides, took his cheeks between them, pulled his face down and kissed it. Shannon kissed her lips, her eyes, her nose. He buried his face in her hair, breathed deeply its fragrance, and they lay together quiet again, occasionally stroking each other. After a while they kissed once more, searched one another's faces, and rolled slowly and clumsily apart. For moments they stretched side by side, their bodies barely touching, and they began to feel the grass and saw again the sky with its few faint stars through the late summer haze.

They turned their faces toward each other and tried to read each other's eyes.

"I might have hurt you," Shannon said. "I was scared of you, scared of doing the wrong things, and I tried to think of nothing but that and you. Only my thinking all stopped."

"And I was afraid only it wouldn't be right enough for you."

"You were my first," he told her.

Janis moved her face over against his cheek, and he felt tears under her lashes. "I know," she said.

They kissed gently without embracing and sat up.

On the way back to the bluff they walked hand in hand, and in the car they sat and smoked cigarettes for a while.

"I'll meet you in Junction City now on every night," Janis said. "Hotel Hardwick."

"Yes," he said. "The town practically joins Fort Riley and is easy to get to. I'll have to be back to camp for reveille and roll every morning in case my name's called. They may start hunting me any time, and if I'm not found there I'll get a court-martial."

Janis shivered a little at the last words. "Could they be looking for you now?"

"Not this time of night." He looked at her, hesitating. "Janis—you will be free and waiting when the war is over?"

"Yes. There is nothing else left for me to do. But I can't write Stiles about it yet."

"I wouldn't ask you to," he said. "I'm cad enough, being here with him over there."

"You're not a cad. We didn't try to fall in love, and we shouldn't feel guilty or ashamed."

"We never will," he said.

"I am terribly sorry for Stiles." She hesitated. Then she said, "Shall I tell you about it now?"

"Do," he said seriously.

Janis drew a long breath. "There is nothing I can ever say against him. I didn't love him really. I had no family living, I was lonely and admired him, and I had never been in love. I wish I hadn't married him. That was wrong—wrong." The words caught, verging upon a sob. Shannon took and patted her hand. "He said I would learn to love him, and I tried, but I never did. I can't live with him again, and I'll tell him as soon as he gets back."

Shannon drew her close without kissing her and stroked her hair.

"He's always been very kind and patient," Janis said.

"I'm glad he was and that you respect him so much," Shannon told her honestly, "and I love you more than ever for knowing how very much you love me."

Janis pressed her cheek to his and afterwards straightened up, withdrawing a little. They sat quiet for a while and looked into the dim night, their hearts at peace from the turmoil within that they had always before felt in each other's presence.

"I wish we could be married now," Shannon said at last. "If you should get pregnant—"

"I won't until you are back and we *are* married."

He found her hand again and pressed it. They looked into one another's eyes and smiled gravely. Shannon squeezed her fingers again and then got out to crank the car.

Shannon went every night to Junction City, and for two weeks lived in heaven. It ended abruptly as he had anticipated but quite by accident. He had returned to his upstairs bunk after reveille and breakfast for a usual nap in the empty barracks and awakened to voices and footsteps on the board floor below. In a flash it came to him that this must be an unannounced inspection of quarters. He sprang up and grabbed for clothing as the captain appeared from the stairs followed by First Sergeant Blum notepad in hand.

Shannon snapped to attention in his underclothes, stiffening his knees against trembling. Two clipped thoughts flashed through his mind: Be dumb, but tell the facts.

Captain Hostetter halted momentarily, stared and then advanced swiftly, projecting his chin. He planted himself squarely before Shannon.

"What's your name, soldier?"

Shannon saluted crisply. "Private John Shannon Garwood, sir."

"What are you doing in here?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know!"

"No, sir. I was assigned to this barracks and never told to go anywhere else, so I stayed."

Hostetter's head turned forty-five degrees backward and stopped as if on a ratchet. "Sergeant, has this man been relieved from drill?"

Blum was out of line to even borders of Shannon's fixed vision. "I would have to check rolls to be sure where he belongs, Captain."

Shannon flicked his eyeballs back straight front before Hostetter could turn back to him. "I've never been assigned to this outfit, sir. I belonged to the 89th Division."

The captain's stiffened jaw opened and also the hard slits of his eyes. "The 89th! I'll be God damned! Don't you know that they're probably in France by this time?"

Shannon maintained respectful stupidity. "I knew they went away somewhere, sir."

"And you stayed behind all alone."

"I don't know whether there was anyone else, sir. My name was not called with the roll of departure. I reported at once to my platoon and company commanders and was told I would be given instructions. I have been waiting for them, sir."

"That's all you know?"

"Yes, sir. I obeyed my orders, sir."

There was complete silence for a moment, and then through his mounting uncertainty of fear, Shannon thought he saw the bare trace of a suppressed grin struggling behind Hostetter's ferocious scowl.

"You are sure you reported at once to your company commander?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Rayburn and the men of my squad can verify that. I wanted to go with them, sir?"

"You were never ordered to report anywhere at all?"

"No, sir."

"You're a hell of a soldier!"

"Yes, sir."

Hostetter eyed him sharply, and Shannon stiff at attention, looked directly ahead as if in stricken helplessness. "You'll damned soon have a place to report! Sergeant, take down this man's name."

"I have it, sir. Private John Shannon Garwood."

Hostetter looked once more hard at Shannon. "To the orderly room, Garwood, on the double. I'll give you five minutes to get into uniform and be there."

At the orderly room they took down Shannon's name again, his serial number, regiment, company and platoon, and they held him there while they checked with post headquarters. That afternoon they cut orders sending him to Fort Leavenworth for assignment to a contingent of trained but sick-leave-delayed or otherwise displaced personnel being organized as overseas replacements. He did not even have a chance to telephone Janis, but he wrote her a letter while on the train.

Chapter 57

On his train to the east coast Shannon did not miss Janis or Chet as much as expected. There was group singing by the soldiers, and for Shannon, on his first time outside his home state, an ever-changing countryside beyond the window.

Many officers were sincere in intentions to make the men's terms in the service an educational experience, and on reaching New York two-day passes were issued for all.

The environment was urban for Shannon when he left camp in the morning. I'll walk on into town, he thought. I have plenty of time and can see better afoot. It felt good to stretch his muscular legs after days of occupying a train seat, and he stepped out briskly, keen with anticipation.

Shannon walked and walked, and after two hours began to fill with bewilderment and misgivings which grew with recollections of Phil's accounts of strangers lost in the city and robbed or disappearing. Shannon had always discredited them with the thought that there would be folks everywhere about. Now he hesitated to make inquiries. People he passed neither smiled nor said, "Good morning." Their faces seemed cold and preoccupied. The more he noticed them the more hostilely foreign they appeared.

Shannon held his shoulders back to appear confident and aloof. The sun pelted down, heating the pavement. His feet, unaccustomed to concrete and brick, grew sore. God, how big was this town!

Block after block his surroundings continued perpetually the same. Then an army truck filled with troops rumbled up from behind.

"Hi, soldier," someone shouted. "Going to New York?"

"Yes," said Shannon.

"Okay, hop in."

The driver slowed. Shannon ran up alongside, caught a pair of big hands reaching down and felt his shoulders almost pulled from their sockets as he was hoisted aboard. Among the packed-in soldiers he looked into the coarse, red face of the man who had called to him and helped him. "Thanks."

"First time in the city, kid?"

Shannon nodded. "I thought I could walk uptown."

The red-faced soldier roared into a laugh, stopped, looked at Shannon's sweating face, and roared again. He stuck out a hairy hand. "Swank Gerringer, field artillery. I'm from Kansas City," he said.

The canvas canopy had been rolled off the truck ribs. The soldiers laughed and pummeled each other, yelled and waved at girls. "Isn't she some chicken. Yea boy!"

The traffic grew to a roar and bustle. When they unloaded in a military parking lot, Shannon got down cramped from the ride after so much walking. At the lot entrance he stood and gazed appalled at what lay before him—the jumble of vehicles, crowded sidewalks, people streaming into and out of a passageway beneath it, and still farther ahead an horizon of tall, tall buildings.

The soldiers scattered from the truck, and Swank Gerringer stopped beside Shannon. "Come on. We take the subway from here."

Shannon followed him down the steps into the electrically lighted tunnel. His heart beat fast in boarding one of the rumbling trains. He had no idea how or when or where to get off. When they did emerge to sidewalk daylight again, buildings around them rose sheer to heights that made the street look like a mere passageway, and the congestion appeared now impenetrable. Shannon felt a strange, suffocating sensation, and he stuck to Swank as if drowning.

It was past noon, and Swank headed into the nearest saloon and ordered two whiskies. He swallowed his drink with a glass of water after it and Shannon followed his lead. The liquor left heat all the way down that the water hardly cooled at all. "Now we'll really feel like eating," Swank said. "No more damned army chow for two days!"

They went out and down the street to a restaurant that looked dim and cool. "Steaks," said Swank, "thick and rare."

"A city's got anything you could want, somewhere," he said as they

ate. "We're going places tonight, kid. It'll be our last chance for a hell of a long while."

"Sure," said Shannon, "as long as my cash holds out."

"Hell, I got plenty of money, wired the old man for it before I left camp. We're gonna do this town. Wanta see a burlesque now?"

"Okay," Shannon said. He thought of stories he had heard of city night life. The stimulating warmth of whiskey and food in his stomach was spreading pleasantly through his body. Where earlier he had pretended nonchalance, now he lost trepidation under Swank's leadership and began to feel like a man of the world.

Outside, Swank hailed a taxi and told the driver what they wanted to see. They rode for blocks and got out before a theater entrance plastered with pictures of women scantily clad. The interior was shabby and momentarily repelling to Shannon. The audience, mostly men, were in shirt sleeves, and the air was stale with tobacco smoke.

Shannon had never believed there were such things as strip teases. The show had already started, and the act in progress confirmed his doubts as he sat down and listened to the loud band and smutty stories by a man who wore a padlock on the front of his trousers.

When the first actress came out and commenced her tantalizing removal of costume piece by piece, Shannon's eyes opened wide. The girl unclasped her brassiere and let it fall but kept her hands over her breasts. The audience whistled and cheered until she revealed her nipples. Shannon hitched uneasily, dropping his gaze, and Swank slapped his shoulder. "Getting nervous, kid!"

Shannon reddened, threw back his head and watched. The girl turned sidewise, dropped her panties and danced off the wing in a G-string.

The audience stamped and shouted. "Come back and take it off!"

To a rattle of drums, the girl pranced out to the center of the stage completely unclad, her bare round breasts bouncing, and faced the footlights with palms spread between her thighs. To the yelling, pounding, and whistling demands she moved aside her hands; and Shannon as he stared thought involuntarily of Janis beautiful and tender in the moonlight—a thought so instantly defiling to her that he felt hot.

After that first full view of nakedness the successive, repetitious strip acts seemed more and more repulsive although the audience always leaned forward and cheered in anticipation. Finally, to the band playing its loudest, the entire troupe of girls came out in the nude and did a bawdy interpretation of Diana and her nymphs sundancing.

"That sure charges your battery!" Swank said, as the curtain came

down. He rose quickly. "Let's go to a stage door and see if they'll let us behind. Those babies might go to bed with you till the night show."

Shannon's stomach tightened and shrank. "Let's see what else we can find."

"Whores are all the same," Swank said.

"Yea, but I want to see the town first."

Swank hesitated and looked toward the wings of the stage. In the interval Shannon had delayed them, other men had already crowded up to the doors. "Well, all right," he said. "There's too many guys ahead now anyway." Shannon felt an edge of rebuke in Swank's tone.

Outside congestion was at its shopping worst. "We can't go anywhere in this jam," Swank said. "Let's have another drink."

"I want to go to the top of a skyscraper," Shannon said.

"Aw shit," said Swank, but he acquiesced.

Another taxi ride, then inside an elevator and up and up. Shannon's ears popped and hurt so that he rubbed them deep.

"Swallow," Swank advised him, "and keep swallowing."

Out on the observation balcony wind blew past and the building seemed to weave. Shannon kept a tight grip on the railing when he looked straight beneath into the chasm of the street at the scurrying ant-like specks of people and vehicles.

Down again on solid concrete, he took a long breath of the hot air in spite of its odors. He looked at the traffic, heavier than ever now with homeward bound workers packing the streets to subways and elevated—dirty working men with lunch pails, undernourished boys in their teens, tired-out shop girls with hard faces. They jostled and pressed, always in a hurry yet seeming to get nowhere.

"Christ, let's eat while these people clear out," Swank said.

In a cafe he again ordered two whiskies ahead of their meal, but this time Shannon stopped him and changed his order to beer. "I want to remember the things I've seen."

Swank grunted and gulped his drink in silence and called for another.

Shannon sipped slowly; yet the more he tried to organize his day's experiences, the more of a confused nightmare it all became. A flock of earth he seemed to be in the rush of a sandstorm. If Chet and me could have been here together. His thoughts whirled and his head throbbed; his neck ached from staring upward.

Later, when evening had come and the many-colored lights were winking and moving and glittering, they went to one of the better theaters upon Shannon's insistence. "Oh well, it won't be night clubbing time till midnight," Swank said.

Swank had drunk half a dozen whiskies with his food and had reached the boisterous stage. Before the theater entrance he crowded through those who stood in line and flashed his roll of bills at the ticket window. "I want two of the best seats in the house!"

Waiting patrons scowled at thus losing their turns and one of the nearest tightened his jaw, fixed his gaze upon Swank for a moment and then said loudly to a companion: "Another drunken soldier."

Swank heard the remark and tickets in hand swaggered over to him. "Sure I'm drunk. Wanta make something of it?"

The civilian's face turned red and white in spots. He was supported by two friends, and all three stiffened at the challenge. Shannon moved dutifully forward, bound by tie of common uniform. Then from out the crowd there loomed up khaki clad shoulders of more soldiers ready to take part in the argument. Their numbers quieted the three civilians, who turned their faces away and said no more.

Shannon drew Swank quickly toward the door. A boy in red and gold uniform led them down a long, carpeted aisle between rows and rows of plush seats. They were among women in long, rustling gowns and men in black tails. Before them rose balconies, and on all sides were boxes with velvet drapes. Their seats were good ones, well forward. Swank dropped into his beside Shannon, took one look around and muttered: "Long-haired stuff." He settled down deep, put his head back to wait for the curtains, and sank at once into a doze.

Shannon gazed and sat dazzled. He looked up at the vaulted ceiling at the rows and rows of tiny bulbs shining and wondered how on earth they were ever reached for replacements.

The overture began. The curtain went up on a strange, bright world of make-believe. From the orchestra pit tones of instruments rose and blended in his ears, and shivers ran along his spine. A spotlight focused upon a garden gate and upon a pretty peasant girl working among real rose bushes beyond it. She rose and tripped gaily forward, held out her arms to him. She opened her lips. Not words came out but light, pure trilling notes that flowed through Shannon. He leaned forward drawn involuntarily to meet them, gaze intent upon the singer. He tried to catch the lyrics and recognized they were in a foreign tongue. Shannon sat back again disappointed yet still held listening by the first great voice he had ever heard. The powerful soprano of the magnificent lady who succeeded the peasant girl sent surge after surge of goose pimples coursing over his body and he forgot that the language remained French. The ancient costumes and court glitter of the performance and the acting itself seemed artificial, but he forgot all that when the knight prince sang in duet with

the peasant girl at her tasks. Their harmony blended for him visually as well as audibly, and closing his eyes to the actors he was enveloped in visions of vibrant waves of red gold.

Swank aroused only once. When a pretty little actress did a swirling toe dance that revealed lovely, snow-white legs, he sat up and blinked. "That's the one I'm going to bed with!" he blurted loudly.

Men and women on either side turned to stare at him.

"I'll take her and—"

Shannon caught Swank's arm as he seemed about to leave his seat. "Hush," he said. He whispered to him that the show was not over.

"All right, I'll wait." When the dance number finished, Swank sank back into his seat, mumbled, and went to sleep again.

Shannon felt his face burning afterwards, and he never became absorbed again in the operetta from reoccurring fears of trouble from Swank trying to go backstage. But when Shannon awakened him after the close, he had forgotten all about it. Outside, Shannon noticed with relief that cooler air and exercise had a sobering effect. "That was a wonderful show," he said. "I'm coming to the same place tomorrow night."

"What for? It'll be the same one over."

"Huh?"

"Some of these places run the same show for weeks or months," Swank told him. "Let's go have another drink."

They went to a night club for a floor show and then to another. Toward morning Shannon left Swank to go to a YMCA building for a bit of rest. They parted coolly, with Swank drinking and waiting for a little belly dancer to do her last number. "I don't have to be back until evening," she had said. She had offered to bring a girl friend for Shannon, but he had thanked her and said he could not stay.

It was not moral objections which restrained him nor fear of getting a girl into trouble now that he was far from home. It was not the stark explanation and warning of venereal diseases set forth by the Funston medical staff in the first days of basic training. It had been his love for Janis, and outside on the street he felt a clean pride in having taken his departure. Yet instead of Janis, at that first moment alone he remembered Phil's clasp under the family picture in the home sitting room and unaccountably heard as if it were his own father who had spoken them John Freeman's words to Chet at Plainsboro station: "You don't have to be a bum to be a good soldier." But Plainsboro itself seemed millions of miles away.

"God, how I wish Chet were here!" Shannon burst out involuntarily. In the next instant it was Janis back dominating his memory, and his ache to hold her again was doubled by his longing for his friend.

Shannon sat the rest of the night in the YMCA lobby, tired but not sleepy from his long day and night. He could have camped wholly by himself for weeks in any wilderness without fear, but here in the midst of millions he was assailed by a bleak and lonely trepidation which kept him wide awake. The tremendous brutal power of the great city seemed a spinning vortex, tossing him from side to side watchful for an unguarded moment when it could draw him in to drown him.

With daylight more soldiers began to gather in for the doughnuts and coffee served and the excursions that had been organized. A Wall Street broker had offered his yacht for a cruise up the Hudson, and Shannon signed with a group for that trip.

When the yacht tied up at Albany not to return until night and the soldiers scattered to see the town, Shannon hired a saddle horse. Riding flat saddle amid the scenic peace of the Catskills with a blue sky above and the hardwood timber changing color, he got back to himself. He ate in a quiet little village of Weichsel where a sign in front of a small restaurant said: "Old Dutch waffles with pure maple syrup." They were so delicious he ordered seconds, and lingering over strong coffee rich with thick cream, recalled fishing stories Phil had told of his boyhood region and composed a letter to write home. The clear streams he had crossed had looked so inviting that he believed every one of Phil's tales now in the itch to try his luck but there was not time.

Shannon stayed away from the yacht until midnight when it was time to leave. When at last he had to go back, he found the soldiers aboard, merry with liquor. Most of them congregated in the beautiful drawing room of the small vessel. There they sat in a circle singing, passing bottles, and pitching smoldering cigarette butts into a pile that grew higher and wider in the center of the rich, brown rug.

"Any luck in this town, Danny?" Shannon heard a soldier inquire. Danny was a burly Irishman with a talent for gambling, but just now he sat on top the splendid upright piano with a whiskey bottle beside him, leading songs with a silver spoon for a baton and beating time with his swinging hob-nailed heels on the varnished walnut.

"Not much," said Danny, without breaking cadence. "Three cops tried to stop our crap game on the sidewalk, and one of them got away!"

There was a roar of laughs.

Shannon moved past and investigated the adjoining sleeping rooms. The beds were so filled with men who had passed out that they lay one across another. He stole a pillow from under the head of one and curled up in a corner. Shannon had been on his feet constantly for forty-eight hours in addition to the cross-country train ride. He dropped off at once

into heavy sleep with the din of piano and discordant harmonizing blurring and fading in his ears: "Ww—aa-ay down ye-onder in the co-orn—fee-eeld."

Chapter 58

Shannon sailed for France from Hoboken aboard the *USS DeKalb*, a small but fast ship formerly a German raider and still mounting the fourteen guns of the Fatherland. Caught outside when the British tightened their blockade in 1915 and running low on fuel, she had been interned at Rio de Janeiro and promptly confiscated and sold to the United States following Brazil's entrance into the war.

Shannon's contingent of mixed replacements reached New Jersey and the Kentucky division waiting for shipment during the fall's first spell of damp, chilly weather to the North Atlantic seaboard. On the day the transports arrived to refuel and make ready to receive their cargoes of soldiers, influenza had broken out in the embarkation camp. The sick were hustled to an isolation hospital, and the remainder given a special medical check on the morning of boarding.

In the *DeKalb* two hundred men were packaged into each of six troop compartments. Following in line down narrow iron stairs below deck with bag weighing on his shoulders, Shannon stepped over the door plate into one. At intervals of two yards, rows of heavy pipes, five feet apart rose from floor to ceiling. On both sides of each row, opening outward like leaves of a book, were iron rimmed canvas bunks each with a canvas life belt hanging at the foot. There was layer upon layer of bunks to within eighteen inches of the ceiling with barely space beneath bottoms for a man to slide his body in horizontally. Shannon edged sideways down the space between two rows to a lower bunk he saw empty and dumped his belongings upon it. It took an hour for the hatchway to clear of incoming soldiers so that he could return above to watch other vessels load.

It was evening before the last columns marched up the gangplanks and the ships left port, course east southeast. They were all night at sea before Shannon discovered that Seaman First Class Andrew York was one of the crew of the vessel carrying him. Andy came upon him in the early morning, standing motionless at the rail with face lifted like a beach visitor to the wonder of the gray, misty ocean—the only soldier yet in sight on the wet, cold deck. Stealing up from behind, Andy landed a whacking wallop between Shannon's shoulders. Shannon lurched and whirled, fists drawn back half in earnest.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

They grabbed and shook each other fiercely by the arms. "I couldn't believe my eyes when I came out of that hatch," Andy cried.

They stepped apart, both still staring in disbelief. "You were stationed at Norfolk the last I heard," Shannon told him.

"I asked for transfer to sea duty," Andy said. "Jesus, I'm glad to see you, boy! How are the folks back home?"

"They're fine. Everybody working his head off and making money by handfuls. Wheat's got up to near three dollars a bushel!"

"That's what Jim writes. I suppose your dad held his last year's crop for the raise?"

"Oh yes. He figured it out right as usual. He says he'll sell every kernel the day he hears it's over."

Andy shook his head admiringly. "I don't know how he does it to beat everybody in the neighborhood on market prices year after year." He paused to chuckle. "All except Bruno Haeckel. Bruno got so he'd just watch and sell when Phil did. I was too stubborn to."

They turned to the rail and lounged side by side.

"How are Vivian and Norma Lee? Is the baby growing?"

"They were out in the field helping at Jim's the last time I was home," Shannon said, "both in overalls. Norma's stretching up faster than a vine. Looks like a young Indian in those black braids of hers. I hardly knew her."

Andy's smile twisted wistfully. "I'd know her."

Shannon told next of Bob and Chet and the names of other neighbor boys already overseas. "Bob has shot down a German plane. The *Chronicle* printed a whole page story on it and a picture of him in flying togs grinning like nobody's business. It scares Mom half to death, but Dad don't say much only that Bob was a damned fool."

"He'll never change on that," Andy said. He wanted to hear all Plainsboro news in detail, but to Shannon so recently away, Kansas was commonplace, and his gaze kept leaving Andy for the gentle but never resting rise and fall of the ocean.

Within a tight circle of destroyers the transports were arranged in block outline of an equilateral triangle. A front row of four abreast was followed by three tapering in, then two more with the *De Kalb* last at the vertex of the rear angle. Out in advance of the screen of destroyers was a warship with gun turrets, and between vessels and beyond them to the horizon there was nothing except the waves.

"That sure would be a lot of water to fish in," Shannon said.

Andy smiled and saw his gaze rove and fix upon the lead ship. "That's

a cruiser," he said, "the *Frederick*—eight inch guns. She's taken us over before. I'd forgotten you had never been on the water."

"It's the first time I've ever seen an ocean. How many submarines have you sunk?"

"None." Andy followed Shannon's disbelieving gaze from the men in the crow's nest with field glasses to the guns ready manned. "We'll get you over all right. You'll hear alarms. We keep watch all the time and fire on every suspicious bit of rubbish sighted, but so far we've actually seen only one sub."

"Did it sink any ships?"

Andy laughed. "We were on the way home alone empty. It was surfaced and didn't bother us, and we didn't bother it."

Shannon gaped. "That sounds like a damned funny war!"

"We could have made it submerge if we had gone for it," Andy said, "but we couldn't have got it afterwards without depth charges. That's a job for destroyers and cruisers. We're under orders to fight only if attacked or to help protect the bigger transports."

The clouds had begun to break, letting the sun through, and other soldiers had come out on deck, lining the rails.

Andy looked at his watch. "I go on duty in the wheelhouse after chow. Tomorrow morning maybe I can show you around the ship."

"I suppose I might as well go down and see what they have left to eat myself," Shannon said.

Andy grinned. "I can tell you. This is Thursday. You'll have prunes and baked beans."

"For breakfast? Jesus!"

After Shannon had eaten, he stood a half-hour in line to get to a stool in the latrine and then waited another hour for his turn to shave. Then he tried to go above again, but the limited deck space for soldiers was so packed that he returned to his bunk and slept. Near noon abandon ship drill was practiced and repeated at eight bells.

Shannon was among the first in line at evening chow and at the deck rail afterwards for the sunset. As the softening colors faded, the bugle sounded call to quarters for the troops. Shannon dawdled until the last, and as he looked back before entering the hatch he saw that the transports were closing in nearer to each other. The moon was low in the west, and he hoped to see it sink across the water if only from a porthole, but below deck every crevice had been closed light tight. In the troop compartment a few bulbs burned yellow, and most of the soldiers were already in their bunks.

Shannon stretched out on his back in his own. The canvas bottom above

sagged almost into his face, and when he tried to lie on his side it pressed heavily and uncomfortably upon his hips and shoulders. Silence had been ordered, but for a long while he heard other soldiers hitching like himself, uneasy in their strange quarters. But it was their second night out, and those who had not slept during the day were tired. The air grew tepid and enervating. The engines pounded on with monotonous rhythm, and there was the steady rush of water against the hull. One by one the men ceased to stir. The snores and slough of heavy breathing grew, and even Shannon relaxed.

Above deck all lights were out. Here and there in the water thrust out from bow and stern, streaks of phosphorescence glowed and wound away into the foam. Except for that, and it was a glow visible for only a few yards, the *DeKalb* and sister transports drove onward hidden in darkness.

When Shannon came out on deck next morning, a convoy from Newport News had joined up, bringing a battleship and more destroyers. The transport formation remained the same but on a larger scale, with five ships in the front row—the center one a high, graceful liner as flagship. The sky was overcast and the sea rougher. Shannon soon faced away from watching the dizzying endless flow of troughs and crests. He was standing with his back to the rail, a hand steadying himself on either side when Andy joined him.

"You've heard of the *Leviathan*," he said, and pointed to the big liner. "That's her. First time she has ever gone over with our convoy. She has too much speed for the rest of us."

Shannon barely turned his head. "Yes," he said.

"I've got an hour. Want to go below with me and see what a ship is made of?"

"I'll wait till tomorrow. I don't like the smell down there."

Andy looked at him more closely. "Getting seasick?"

"Only a bit queasy, but some of the boys aren't leaving their bunks."

Andy grinned and repeated the old story. "When it first hits you, you're scared you'll die. The second day, you don't care; and if it lasts a third you're afraid you'll live! It never kills anybody though."

"I'm not scared of that," Shannon said. "It's these things they issued us this morning." He pulled a crumpled influenza mask from his pocket. "There are three or four cases already."

"The crew got 'em when we left port," Andy said. "We're supposed to wear them below deck, but nobody does."

"Nobody can if he gets to puking, and we were all exposed in camp before we came aboard. They had no business loading us."

"They need men bad over there," Andy told him. "We have to get across before the Germans can make another big drive and take Paris."

"Maybe Foch wants to use Americans to save his own soldiers. Remember how the British held theirs back on Joffre in 1914?"

"Our generals won't let that happen to us."

"Our generals hell! The army lost me for a month and a half back in Camp Funston. That shows what the officers know. Why should our brass be any smarter about what's going on in France?"

"We're training hundreds of thousands," Andy said quietly. "You can't judge just by what happened to you."

"It isn't just me. I'm with a whole company of misplaced guys. We're just attached to this division till we get overseas."

Andy observed Shannon narrowly. How they all hate the army, he thought. He wanted to tell him how lost and lonely a soldier could be after his first joy of discharge, but he knew Shannon could not understand that at this point. So he said simply, "You like to argue as much as your Dad." To that Shannon grinned proudly. "He tried to talk me out of enlisting even back in 1898. But we're in this war and we have to win."

"Dad says that much, too, now," Shannon told him. He eyed Andy with a sidelong sparkle temptingly half concealed. "Why didn't you join Roosevelt again and get 'em to let him take his hundred thousand Rough Riders over after the Kaiser? You could have had another bully fight!"

Andy did not laugh in acknowledgement as Shannon expected. He smiled but only faintly. "Teddy advertised himself and he liked excitement, but he could have gotten killed by the Spaniards as easy as any of us. One of his sons has been by the Germans." He paused, drawing breath, and his gaze came to rest most solemnly upon Shannon. "Anyway, this war is different. Nobody hates war more than President Wilson. I remember the last talk he had with Bryan after he had resigned. It brought tears to Wilson's eyes when Bryan spoke of the families who would suffer and begged him to keep us out, but he told Bryan there was no alternative but to get it over with and this time settled right. He said civilization could not withstand another war like this one. 'It will be the world's last chance to learn to live in peace.'"

"He might be right," Shannon said slowly. "My history professor thought so too—and I had another one that didn't." At memory of Professor Schleicher he halted and gazed above and beyond the horizon of the sea. The eagerness and pride he had felt in the chemistry laboratory already seemed like a happy recollection from childhood. Everything about college had become dim and far off—except Janis.

"You can't wait for unanimous faith in world union," Andy said. "You have to start with majority support and build on."

"If you have such a majority," said Shannon, turning back. "And using it to get long term cooperation from nations is still something else. Like Dad says those European countries never did get along together. After the war we'll send our envoys to talk to theirs, and all those countries will be trying to get ahead of each other. The people won't even know what's going on."

Andy looked unshaken full into Shannon's eyes. "Yes they will," he said quietly. "Wilson will know, and he'll tell them. 'Open diplomacy, openly arrived at!' He isn't going to take chances on sending somebody else. I've been at cabinet meetings, and I can say this to you for sure: Wilson will go himself." He paused, and the corners of his mouth quivered gently. "I've often thought how much I'd like to have him go across on my ship."

A naval officer approaching along the deck looked first at Shannon and then Andy, eyeing him for his earnestness. He turned his face deliberately in passing so as not to require a salute.

"I never saw one do that in the States," Shannon said.

"No, they're more man to man at sea and overseas."

It had begun to mist, and Shannon went for his slicker. More men had taken to their bunks, and he remained only long enough to snatch up the garment. Andy was gone when he got back, but rejoined him almost immediately.

"We're in for a blow. I went to the wheelhouse for a look at the barometer, and it's falling fast. Notice how it's been warming up since morning? We're entering the Gulf Stream."

Shannon swallowed twice before he spoke. "I could stand it still warmer and do without the rain. I'd like to stay up here all the time. The smell in that compartment damned near got me. How many more days till we land?"

"Oh, Lord, I couldn't tell! We're just started. It depends on weather and route. I never know what port we're going to, because we keep changing course. Once we went away south through the Straits of Gibraltar and up to Marseilles. Usually it's Brest or St. Nazaire, and that takes about two weeks."

"Two weeks in that hole below every night! My God!"

"Try not to think about getting sick," Andy told him. He stayed long enough for a cigarette before going on duty, but Shannon did not want to smoke.

The wind shifted to starboard after Andy left. It brought short, inter-

mittent showers of huge drops driving in across the rail, and Shannon started to the port side. The warm blast coming up from the galley ventilator struck him as he passed under the bridge island, and he clapped a hand over his nose and ran. The rain seemed to follow him across the ship, and he found partial shelter on the leeward side of some lashed stacks of life rafts. Now and then a wave broke over the bow. The few other soldiers disappeared, but he stayed on, alone on the wet, gray deck except for occasional hurrying sailors in oilskins.

Most of Shannon's nausea was gone when Andy came by for a moment after mess, and he was again at the rail, facing into the wind and rain. The transports had ceased zigzagging.

"The waves are running too high for subs to operate now," Andy said. He thrust a couple of oranges into the pocket of Shannon's streaming slicker. "You ought to have something on your stomach, and fruit is the best thing."

Shannon ate both. They tasted tangy and good. Afterwards in an interval between showers he had his first smoke of the day. He had just begun to feel at home when the loudspeaker coughed and crackled. "Now hear this. All soldiers return to quarters below deck. All soldiers return to quarters below deck."

A few troops had come out again for air while the rain was stopped, and Shannon followed these to the hatch. He glanced about while they entered. No one else was in sight, and as the last stepped through, Shannon turned and ran swaying with the deck back to the life rafts and ducked in between two of the stacks. He got down and crawled as far forward as he could. There was enough length of space to stretch out with his head almost to the rail. He raised himself on his elbows and lay with chin between hands. The motion of the ship was less noticeable prone. At times she seemed to stand still in a trough with an incredibly steep wall of water rushing down upon her. Wind and spray on his face was at first exhilarating, and he breathed deeply, but after a while he became cramped and chilled. He thought of Janis, the white sheets of their hotel room, and her cuddly warmth. The steel plates under him grew harder and harder, and after the rain started again it became so cold he could no longer refrain from stirring now and then. He remained hidden until late afternoon when a passing naval lieutenant noticed a movement and a protruding hobnailed shoe. He stopped and kicked the leather sole.

"What the hell are you doing up here? Didn't you hear the orders to go below?"

Shannon backed out and stood up straight and saluted. "No, sir," he answered promptly.

"Well, get down there before you're washed overboard."

"Yes, sir." He started to salute again, but the deck slanted unexpectedly, and he caught at the stack of rafts. He edged along them to the rail and clung to it as support for his stiff, cramped legs, following it back toward the hatch. The Lieutenant watched him all the way, and as he went Shannon saw crewmen stringing guide ropes to help them about the deck during the night. The warm, fetid air that met him when he stepped down through the iron doorway seemed to clog in his throat.

In the troop compartment soldiers lay on their bellies across their bunks, heads lolling in wretchedness. Two sailors with swabs were mopping, and the pungent antiseptic odor of pinocide cut through the sour smell of vomit. The little life belts swung to and fro on their straps at the foot of the bunks.

Shannon got to his place and lay down, cursing himself for lack of foresight to choose an upper berth. If that bastard above splatters me. It's like Andy says, I've got to shut my mind. If I can do that and not eat anything.

Directly across an Irishman writhed and gagged, alternately swearing and praying. Shannon closed his eyes to him, but he could not shut out the voices of the two bluejackets.

"Yuh know what we're having for chow tonight, Stevey?"

"Fish stew, I hope."

"Nope. Nice, fat, juicy, boiled pork!"

Shannon gulped and swallowed.

"Delicious!" Stevey said. "The khakies can eat it on a string. Then if it troubles their guts, they can pull it up again."

The Irishman forced his head up to look at them. "I'll kill you son-of-bitches, if I ever get well!"

"Listen to him, Stevey."

"I'm listening."

At that moment the ship, which seemingly had been rising, rising forever, balanced at a standstill. There was a creaking and straining as the vessel yawed and then went swooping down. Mop handles clattered to the floor as the sailors clutched the nearest iron pipes and were swung half around them. It was the end pitch in nautical language, and for Shannon everything fell with the ship except his stomach. That went on rising. He rolled onto his belly and hung his head over the bunk, choking and gagging.

By midnight the decks were awash. Hatches had been battened down and everything made secure, but progress had stopped. The transports

rolled and tossed, headed into the wind and battling to hold position. Of them all the giant, modern *Leviathan* was able to make headway. She sailed under free orders, and her commander signalled the *George Washington* to take authority as flagship and went on alone.

Down in troop quarters on the *DeKalb*, there were not long handles enough to keep up with the mopping. Soldiers who fell from their bunks or whose legs gave way as they tried to stand, lay and rolled from side to side in their own vomit. In adjoining latrines the drains had had to be closed, and filth accumulated flooding the floors.

It was twelve hours before the wind subsided enough for the convoy to resume half speed, and another twelve before Shannon began to consider life worth living. By then their quarters had been cleaned, and at evening chow time feeding was resumed for those soldiers who cared to eat. Shannon got in line and filed past the galley tincup and tin plate in hand for a dipperful of slum gullion, coffee and bread. He carried it back to the compartment and sat on the edge of his bunk, bent far forward because of the next one so close overhead. The coffee was hot, black, and bitter. He sipped it, looking at the food on his knees. He tried a few uncertain bites and found that he could keep it down, and then cleaned up all of it.

Andy came for Shannon the next morning and took him on deck, although the hatches were not yet officially open. Shannon blinked and squinted against the sunlight on the water.

"Our officers are pretty good fellows," Andy told him. "They won't say anything to you up here as long as you're with me. They're going to let you all come out again this afternoon."

"Thank God for that!" Shannon said, and Andy grinned at him.

"You're looking blue about the gills, *soldier*."

"It wasn't so bad as long as I had anything left in me to throw up," Shannon said; "but when you're empty and still keep trying, I'll tell you that hurts!" He stopped and looked Andy up and down. "Seems to me you're a little lank yourself, sailor. I supposed you gobs were too tough for the ocean."

"I thought so, too, that I was a real salt sailor after training on Lake Michigan, but there are mighty few never affected. I've heard tell of gray haired seamen crawling on hands and knees during a bad storm."

"Wasn't this a bad one?"

"Not particularly. And anyway you fellows didn't have to work. We did. Seasickness never excuses a sailor from duty."

"How the hell can you do it?"

"I don't know. They just tell us we have to."

Andy had brought more oranges and a bunch of grapes. They ate them,

clinging to the rail with one hand, for the sea still ran strong. Great waves, rising high, flung off their crests in sheets of shining spray. Except for the *Frederick* and *North Carolina* the transports were now alone.

"Destroyers go back to lead new fleets out to sea," Andy said.

The first shock of cold air had acted as a bracer to Shannon, but he was soon shivering. Yet he liked the salty tang and sucked it deep into his lungs.

"There is a rumor this morning of Negro troops rioting the other night. Is that another latrine story?"

"It didn't come from the head," Andy said, "and we're not supposed to talk, but I'll tell you. Some of them got scared during the storm and tried to break out of their hatch. Their first sergeant got his face laid open with a razor trying to stop them. One of our firemen got hold of an axe and held them on the stairs till a squad of marines got there."

"Leathernecks with the situation in hand," Shannon said.

"Yeah. They put the leaders clear down in the bilge in irons. They'll stay there till we dock."

"Poor bastards. I don't blame them for getting scared, locked in like we were. If something happened how would we get out?"

"Maybe you wouldn't, all of you," Andy said, "but we can't have you fellows overrunning the ship."

Shannon faced up to him without deference to the lined and graying temples of seniority. "I was scared too even if I didn't panic," he said quietly. "I don't want to die either." He turned back to the rail.

Andy also gazed in silence at the sea. What had happened to this industrious, fun-loving boy who had been the plague of every melon patch and apple orchard in the home neighborhood?

The cold began to distress Shannon, so that he was ready to return below by the time Andy went back on duty. He dozed off and awoke with back and joints aching. He did not get up for chow and was running a temperature when the doctor came through in the afternoon. He gave a pill and ordered Shannon to stay in his bunk well covered.

Andy came to see him near evening wearing a flu mask, an order enforced now upon the sailors from the doctor's fears of an epidemic among the crew. Shannon was wide awake and talkative, but with a feverish brightness in his eyes. There were a dozen men sick in the compartment. Andy knew that the ship's hospital ward was full and that there had been a death. He knew also that the *North Carolina* had been requested to transfer a part of her medical staff to the *President Grant* as soon as the sea abated. He did not mention any of that.

Andy left early to relieve the port quarter lookout for chow and took

over in time for the first alarm of the voyage. The *Covington*, in position directly in front of the *DeKalb*, sighted what looked to be a submarine awash against the sunset about a mile off the port bow and blew warning. General alarm sounded. As he adjusted focus on his glasses, Andy heard the scramble of sailors running to battle stations and the few soldiers on deck being hurried below. They didn't want to go. They had crowded to the port railing to look and had to be herded. Too bad Shannon couldn't be here for the excitement, Andy thought. I hope he doesn't get scared again down there.

The *DeKalb's* guns were being trained, but the *Covington* went into action before them. Her second round smashed the target. Secure was sounded after the *Frederick* had swung aside to investigate. She signaled floating debris.

Lights were out with quiet ordered for all quarters before Andy was free again; and he asked Charley Robinson, a crewman friend and Nebraskan, to relieve him temporarily during morning deck duty to hear what the medical officer on his rounds said about Shannon.

Andy found him tossing and longing for the doctor to come again.

"Every time those pills he gives me begin to wear off," he said, "it feels like my head was being squeezed in a vice while somebody pounded on it." He rejected oranges and grapes which Andy had brought.

Andy told him the weather remained fair. "It should be calm by tonight and might stay that way the rest of the voyage." He sat on the edge of the bunk until the doctor and medical aid entered the compartment, and stood up at attention when they approached Shannon in his turn. Andy saluted the officer's challenging glance. "He's my nephew, sir."

The doctor showed momentary surprise, then nodded without returning salute. He took Shannon's pulse and temperature, looked briefly at his eyes and into his throat. Finished, he gave instructions to the aid who wrote them down on the chart that swayed from the rail at the foot of the bunk. "This Spanish influenza takes three or four days to run its course," he said and moved on. Shannon got another pill from the aid. Andy went back topside to take over from Robinson.

The wind had abated throughout the night, and the convoy had resumed standard speed of fourteen knots. Soon after Andy returned to duty the *Grant* and *North Carolina* effected safely their transfer of personnel. It brought him that feeling of relief for completion of something awaited until two hours later he saw the *Princess Matoika* in line behind the *Grant*, sheer five hundred yards starboard. All vessels lowered their flags to half-

mast and for a brief interval stopped their engines while the *Grant* buried at sea her surplus dead.

"Jesus, they must be in bad shape over there!" a staring deck mate said. Andy, gazing and with a cold crinkle along his spine, did not answer. That afternoon the ceremony was repeated for the *Ascanius*, a British transport with five corpses. Near dusk the *Grant* buried again, eight in number. Flags lowered, the *DeKalb* slid coasting through the sea, engines silent. Across the water against the bright afterglow Andy watched the brief service and counted the objects dropped rapidly one after another from the chute rigged out from the forward, starboard side—naked bodies, he knew, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes and sewed up in canvas pouches weighted at the feet. The shocking question struck him then of how many coffins aboard his own ship had been filled. How many remained empty? How long until they might be the center of this scene? And Shannon? Not him, muttered Andy to himself, instantly and violently checking the thought.

Taps came faintly upon the quiet air.

The next morning rumors circulated of first cases of influenza among the crew. The doctor confirmed them at once and posted a list of the few so far afflicted to head off panic from exaggeration.

Below deck on visits to Shannon, Andy found him for two days constantly groggy with dope and always left after only a moment to get above again away from questions by other soldiers about the worsening situation aboard all transports. The *George Washington* had also begun burying at sea. At the end of the third day the medicines were reduced for Shannon and his mind cleared. He said he felt better. His influenza seemed to have passed its climax true to the doctor's predictions, but Andy did not like the chesty, hacking cough which had developed and made it a point to be present for the next morning medical check. He entered the compartment to find Shannon in the midst of a convulsion of coughing which left his face pale and twisted with pain. He lay for a moment exhausted with his hands pressing his ribs before he spoke. "It feels like somebody put a red hot stove in there," he said at last, attempting to grin. His voice sounded hoarse and stifled. Andy had hopefully again brought oranges, but Shannon shook his head even to the offer to squeeze him a cupful of juice.

When the doctor came he was several minutes over Shannon with the harsh army blankets turned back to listen at his chest and thump upon it with strong, supple fingers, a surgeon's fingers. Andy had heard he was from the famed Mayo Clinic. Finished he ordered an immediate hypo-

dermic. With stethoscope hanging about his neck he moved on, but out of hearing stopped and beckoned Andy. "Pneumonia," he said severely.

Andy knew he blanched from the prickly numbness which deadened his forehead and cheeks at the doctor's tone. "He won't— He's not going to—" Andy's tongue could not articulate the ominous word.

"It is a dangerous complication. If he gets past the next seventy-two hours he'll have a good chance. His heart gives indication that he may." The officer started to turn but stayed the movement and looked again at Andy's tortured face. "Give my aid your name, and I will arrange for you to be with him through the crisis."

Andy stayed with Shannon until the hypo put him to sleep. Alone on lookout topside his first shock from Shannon's critical condition gave way to thoughts of his own responsibilities in relation to it. Should he tell him how bad he was? Or would that frighten him and increase the danger? There might be something he needed to say. It seemed so to Andy in sudden, sharp recollection of how Shannon had faced up to him on deck and asserted: "I don't want to die." Did he have something special to live for—some last word he would want to leave if he could not? I'll wait till it comes to that—if it does, Andy decided, adopting postponement, refusing to believe that Shannon would die, yet knowing that if he did die there might be no last chance to speak.

When the *Grant* buried again that forenoon, Andy had the thought of those long, gray sacks upright in the water, sinking and sinking, rocked gently from side to side by waves. It brought back to him his own horror in Cuba of dying alone among strangers, covered and lost in an unknown grave. In spite of his San Juan battle experience Andy had never connected this war realistically with thousands of dead and wounded men. He had to face the fearful acknowledgment of that cost now. But why traditional interment should seem so sacredly desirable he did not ask himself—or why burial at sea seemed a hundred times worse culmination in nothingness. Every time it occurred to him in connection with Shannon, he saw his freckled face, merry-eyed and seriously future-minded by turns, and Andy's soul shrank. It did so instinctively because death of Shannon threatened to destroy in Andy's soul the two chief motivating forces of his life—joy of actively living and belief in a practical worth in the dreams of men.

While he waited out each critical day, whenever Andy did duty at the wheel sailors came from the bulletin board where they counted the sick list to the pilothouse to learn their position. They left cursing their course which still held east by southeast, indicating the long, long curve down through Gibraltar. The convoy was running fast, stretching standard

speed to seventeen knots, eighteen knots, then nineteen. The *DeKalb* took it easily, having been built for the chase, but the speed put questionable strain on the engines of clumsier companion vessels.

Throughout the ship deadly fascination had centered upon the race of the transports, a drama made fantastic below deck by the faces half hidden behind white flu masks. Among groups of off-duty sailors, Andy did not hear a laugh of daytime, and of nights there were always men sitting in the smoking room unable to sleep. On duty they put a kind of frenzied efficiency into their work.

Reveille, flags half-masted. Sweepdowns and another half-mast call—*Antigone* joins list of ships burying. Chow. Submarine alarm—fourteen shots. Secure. *Covington* buries. Clocks jumped forty-one minutes. Course changed east northeast. More half-masts. Pilot duty again, course back to east southeast. Barometer falling, sea becoming rough. Speed reduced to ten knots. Twelve corpses overboard, nineteen more, eight, twenty-two. Evening chow. Barometer steady but low. *Pastores* and *Ryndon* begin burying together. Hammocks, reveille and the hull throbbing again at resumed speed through rain and a choppy sea. Burials, hammocks, reveille. Burials. Burials. Burials.

The crisis for Shannon came on the night predicted. Andy had looked in on him that evening before going to quarters and found him sleeping under morphine. It seemed to Andy he had scarcely grown comfortably warm in his blankets when he was startled out of troubled sleep by a hand tapping the bottom of his hammock and a voice telling him to report to troop compartment D.

The medical aid who awakened him did not wait. Both he and the doctor, red-eyed and unshaven, were with Shannon when Andy arrived. The aid sat at the foot of his bunk with hands under extra blankets spread over it massaging his legs. The doctor with disc of stethoscope underneath the blankets was listening at his chest. Neither looked up at his approach. Shannon was conscious but motionless on his back and smiled faintly in recognition. Andy nodded and smiled back. After a few minutes his eyelids closed. When he was clearly sleeping the doctor withdrew the stethoscope tube. As he took the hooks from his ears, Andy saw that the long, splendid fingers were trembly tired. For a little while he held Shannon's wrist; and Andy, trying to read the doctor's face, watched half fascinated the exhausted twitching of the muscles.

"His feet are warm now," the aid said, and the officer nodded to cease massaging. He spoke to Andy. "His pulse was almost gone when I got here. I loaded his hypo with stimulant for the heart and it has responded. Our problem is to keep it going until the lungs clear." He turned back

to the aid. "I want the injection repeated every four hours. Check his circulation each time and call me if it begins to fade again."

When they had gone Andy sat down on the cold, plate-iron floor in the narrow space between bunks facing Shannon. He drew up his knees and locked his fingers about them. His head was at a level with Shannon and he kept vigil without movement. The gauze flu mask over Andy's mouth and nose impeded breathing and he pulled it down and let it hang around his neck. More and more it was recognized as a useless annoyance with exposure constant at chow time and in crew sleeping quarters.

In the dim compartment a few bunks were empty now. From some soldiers snored. In others they tossed and shifted in their blankets. The coughing was continual from one area to another. Shannon coughed too occasionally, and Andy felt from the twisting of his lips whenever he did that it must hurt even under morphine.

During slowly passing hours that Andy watched, Shannon tried to arouse only once. He half lifted hands as if reaching and his face took on a smile. "Ja—Ja-an—is." He stopped but Andy bent quickly to him.

"Yes, Shannon," said Andy. He saw him start momentarily at his name and tried to prompt him. "Is what?" The blue eyes opened and looked at him wide and vacantly. "Is what? Tell me, Shannon."

Shannon's lips worked again but only a mumble came forth. His breathing clogged into a cough and he lapsed.

He was dreaming, thought Andy. He didn't recognize anything. Yet Andy had felt tender desperation in the effort to awaken and to speak, and his heart sank cold as stone in knowledge of the stepped-up hypos to keep him in his coma. What were those last words he wanted to say? Why did I not tell him how critical he was while he could still say them?

The medical aid came back on his rounds. "No change," he said of Shannon; but to Andy, who also felt his pulse, it seemed to be barely ticking. Shortly after the aid left, two sailors with a stretcher entered the compartment and removed a corpse. When they were gone, Andy sat and gazed at the pale, motionless face before him. Shannon had not aroused during the examination, seemed to be sinking slowly deeper and farther, and for the first time since death of his mother Andy felt his eyes filling. This time they were tears of contrition more than of grief, and he arose jerkily, purposefully to his feet. He stood a moment stiffening his lips then left the compartment.

There was someone always now at the carpenter's storeroom where the coffins were kept, and Andy wanted to make sure of one for return of Shannon's body. It was no surprise, short-handed as they were, to find the

chief himself on duty shift. "It's a good thing you came," he said grimly when Andy had spoken. "There aren't many more empty."

Andy went up on deck instead of back to the troop compartment. At the rail under moonless sky he stared at the massive, heaving grayness of the inscrutable sea. With hands gripping the cold iron he prayed, not to any personal God or even consciously, but mutely and instinctively without realizing that what he felt was prayer—as higher creatures, man and beast, when confronted by annihilation cry out silently or aloud to the power they sense beyond their ken.

When Andy returned below it was to the smoking room. The tension he had undergone as it subsided had left an unbearable craving for tobacco. He sat down at the long card table near the pot of strong coffee someone had brought from the galley. None of the sailors present were playing or conversing and Andy spoke to no one. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, each fresh one lighted from the stub of the preceding. The vibration of the ship maintained tiny, jiggling ripples on the black surface of the liquid in the tincup between his hands.

Andy did not return to sit with Shannon because he could not bear to watch him die. He was waiting at the compartment doorway and entered with the doctor on morning rounds, sure that he would be dead, yet feeling it necessary that he be present at the pronouncement.

Shannon was still lying flat on his back. The profound change apparent in him as they approached his bunk confirmed Andy in his conviction and a leaden chill in his body spread into his limbs. Then he recognized with a start that peaceful and pale as was the face, the eyelids were not lax half-open in the stare of death but closed. He saw also in the next instant with a great, gushing thrill of hope that the catchy, stifled efforts to get breath of the night before were gone, that the khaki blankets were rhythmically rising and falling. The doctor bent down in scrutiny, and from over his shoulder Andy saw moisture on Shannon's forehead. The shock of bright red hair was dark with dampness. The doctor straightened without disturbing Shannon. "Omit the next hypodermic," he instructed his aid. "He needs to awaken and take nourishment." His eyes looked gratified despite hollows beneath them as he assured Andy the crisis was past. "Your nephew must have been in unusually sound physical condition," he added.

Short-handed aboard ship, Andy as one of the well crewmen drew extra duty that day after his regular morning shift in the wheelhouse. Red-eyed but too thankfully happy to feel tired he was scrubbing deck with Robinson when the silence of voices unnatural for so long topside was

broken by shouts. Before he could straighten up, Robinson had thrown down his mop and seized him by the shoulders, turning him toward the port bow. Out of the clearing afternoon mist, a great arc of destroyers was bearing down upon them.

"Look—oh Jesus, look! It's our convoy!"

About the deck men were everywhere yelling and pointing. Andy threw down his hose still gushing and raced to tell Shannon, crowding his way past sailors running up the hatch stairs. Shannon did not move except to turn his head to listen. He did not speak, only swallowed with almost tearful brightening of face. Andy repeated the news for other soldiers who had crowded about him. Those well enough headed at once for the deck to see for themselves. "It won't be long now," Andy said. He gave Shannon's shoulder a gentle squeeze and ran off to take word to other troop compartments.

By the time Andy got back above, the destroyers were surrounding the transports; and as soon as the circle was closed, the *North Carolina* and *Frederick* turned back for home. That night lights were sighted off the Spanish coast during his midnight to eight bells watch; and dawn filtered in through high clouds over a subsiding sea with the convoy on course north northeast—straight for St. Nazaire.

Chapter 59

Thirty hours after contacting their overseas convoy, the transports crossed the line where brown, sediment-laden river water pressed out like a dividing wall into the transparency of the sea, and entered the quiet estuary of the Loire. As twinkling lights along shore faded with daybreak, the convoy was joined by a trio of seaplanes. These separated and came in so low that the heads of the observers in helmet and goggles were distinguishable above the cockpits, as well as the short row of bombs tucked tightly under each wing as they circled and crossed overhead in slow vigilance.

The formation of ships changed to a long file. Land on either side continued to crowd in, mists to melt away. At 6:30 they were passing items familiar from previous trips—masts of a French monitor above the surface where a submarine had scored early in the war, then Bell Island. Rays of the sun broke over low-lying hills, touched and burnished the high, red roofs of Sarah Bernhardt's summer home. An hour later they were entering the safety zone of mines and nets with the destroyers standing by behind, except for one as guide along the narrow, winding lane of free water.

Cheers went up at sight of the *Leviathan* riding safe and high at anchor, and the sailors waved hats to her crew in passing. Too large for the locks above, she had unloaded by lighters in the outer harbor.

With screws barely turning over, the *DeKalb* followed in line on up the channel and dropped anchor to await higher tide. Andy went for a last visit with Shannon. He was too weak to raise himself but said all pain was gone, and he was hungry for the fruit Andy brought.

"You'll land in a few hours," Andy told him. "Hospitals have been notified by wireless and emptied for you. Stay down and take care of yourself, boy. The war can wait. Make them think you're sick till you're sure you are all well. I won't get shore leave to see you again." He shook with warm clasp the hand held out to him.

"I'll be all right," Shannon said. "Thanks for everything, but don't write the folks about me. There's no use worrying Mom."

A seaman from Topeka that Andy knew well was critically ill, but when he went aft to see him also it was to learn he had died during the night. The body was in its berth. Andy got Robinson and a stretcher, and they took it to the embalming room. On the way Andy told of the coffin he had earlier reserved for Shannon. "I wish we still had it," he said, looking at the still form between them.

The ship's carpenter was there when they entered and the doctor who nodded Andy and Robinson toward a row of corpses. "Put it with them." He turned back to the carpenter. "I want ten more roughboxes, any kind to hold bodies till they can be put ashore."

Andy and Robinson deposited their stretcher and waited at attention until the doctor had finished. He recognized Andy, yet took a moment in looking at him as if organizing his thoughts. "I have checked your nephew for leaving ship. He is safe now."

"Thank you, sir." Emboldened by complete relief, Andy indicated the body of the sailor they had brought. "He's one of our crew, sir, and from my home state. I wish we could take him back with us."

"All our caskets have been filled and sealed."

Still rigid, Robinson's hands twitched involuntarily. "I do not wish to presume, sir, but would it be possible to take a soldier out of one and put our boy in?"

The officer looked at them. Both the weariness and sternness in his face softened. "I suppose so. Yes, I will have one opened."

Andy felt his salute snapping up automatically. "Thank you, sir." He did an about face with Robinson and they went out.

"Pretty white fellow, that doctor," Robinson said, on the way topside.

"If it's a damned marine in the coffin, they can just throw him to the sharks."

At six bells they got underway and proceeded up the bay into the locks where they were raised to water level with the river. Clouds had come back, bringing a slow-falling drizzle.

The soldiers were ready and waiting when the ships docked. Stretcher cases went first, covered with tarpaulins, and were handed one by one into ambulances that drove past the gangways in a slow, halting stream. Watching, Andy wondered which stretcher was Shannon's.

Shannon's incredible recovery had at first seemed to Andy like a purposeful reconfirmation of his old beliefs, until sight of the corpses in the embalming room and stacked roughboxes waiting to be put ashore compelled him to recognize how many had died and that Shannon might well have been any one of them. Or I might have been, thought Andy. The last thought coming quietly and unbidden did not disturb him as had that of the deaths of others, but brought to him for the first time in his life anticipations of relief. He did not like them and turned his mind from the cost of the war in lives to Wilson's great goal of world peace. He told himself that for such a goal even Shannon's death would have been worthwhile.

Ashore, after the ambulances, next came the trucks with their ribbed canopies of sagging canvas for the sick troops and naval crewmen able to walk. The well went last. In fast moving columns of two abreast they were hurried down the gangplanks, formed into fours in the cindered dockyard and marched away. Andy still worked topside after the *DeKalb* was empty, and companies from larger transports continued to land. He saw them against a background of dripping warehouses with yards and quays deserted of spectators. It was the landing site for the first troops he had brought over, and the crowd then must have been gathering for hours to shout: "*Vive la France! Vive les États Unis!*" The band playing on shore and whistles of harbor crafts in continuous blasts. Girls with flowers.

Must be getting used to us coming over, he thought. And as finally he watched the last columns of soldiers disappear into evening gloom, there arose unexplained in his mind the picture of strange, thin-flowing prairie streams emptying into a bog.

Unloading of equipment was completed under searchlights. Taking on water and disinfecting of quarters began at once and continued through the night. Crippled soldiers started coming aboard next morning, among them an attended file of shell-shocked cases walking with hands tied behind them—some wild-eyed with ticks twitching their faces, others with fixed, vacant stares directed straight ahead. The officers' quarters of Num-

ber Two deck were vacated for them where they were locked under guard. Four Red Cross Nurses who had been gassed were given a cabin together.

Rain fell out of a leaden, low-hanging overcast. It ran in flat streams off tin roofs of numberless warehouses crammed to capacity, and it fell upon accumulations of crated equipment stacked outside between buildings and along rail sidings for as far as Andy could see. Some of the crates looked so old and weathered that their contents must have been damaged past usefulness and there came to him acknowledgment of Bryan's words spoken long ago in Hotel Throop of resources wasted in war. Through thoughts and rain the unloading of freighters and loading of the transports went on steadily.

The *DeKalb* was secure for sea by high tide, passing the locks and steaming down the channel in line with seven other transports. Beyond the mine fields destroyers awaited them. In the Bay of Biscay they took up convoy formation, the *DeKalb* turning into a left forward position of the triangle, with the *Covington* next behind her. The wind had shifted to northwest. The clouds had begun moving, and the rain had ceased. The ships wallowed and rolled in a heavy ground swell.

Robinson came up beside Andy at the rail. "Four hours duty on and off. That means working again at midnight," he announced.

"I know. I was on point of going below to grab a few winks. We'll need all the rest we can get," Andy said.

"Have a cigarette with me first." Robinson held the match for both, sheltered in his cupped hands. "Why do you suppose we have the destroyers? They don't usually take us out empty."

"I heard Lieutenant Meyers say they had to meet more transports and were just tagging us for a ways. Maybe he knew. You've heard the scuttlebutt on the *President Lincoln*? U-boats got her the other day not far out of Brest."

"The hell!" Robinson took a pull on his cigarette. "What the devil would we do with our wounded and those shellshocks if we got it?"

"We couldn't do much. That might be the reason for the convoy."

Dusk gathered slowly as they talked, and in the failing light the ships closed in to three hundred yards, still zigzagging. The *DeKalb* got a little ahead in the maneuver and was dropping back to reestablish position when the *Covington's* siren blew. Almost at the same instant she opened fire close off her port bow. Andy looked toward the shell bursts and caught a dull glint of reflection from something that looked like a dark tin can topping a wave. The *DeKalb* shook twice as her stern and port guns joined those of the *Washington* while general quarters was sounding. Robinson and Andy ran for battle stations, the latter to the after magazine

port side. He leaned for balance against the sloping of the deck as the *DeKalb* turned with rudder hard a-port. By the time he had reached his place, the convoy was dividing, but his battery was out of firing position. The nearest destroyer was heading back to get between the transports and the danger zone. The remaining troop ships sheered forty-five degrees starboard, gaining speed as they fled. At that moment came the jarring thud of a heavy underwater explosion, and the *Covington's* stern rose out of the sea, her after well deck all but obliterated by tons of water hurled into the air. The *Ryndon* with stern battery firing raced for safety across in front of her stricken sister. Andy saw the white, bubbly wake of a second torpedo cut through the water and pass harmlessly behind the *Ryndon*.

The *DeKalb* finished her arc and came back zigzagging, her port guns fore and aft coming into play with each swing. Every ship that could bring a gun to bear upon the general location of the submarine was firing now, and spouts of water from the shell bursts were leaping up all over the area.

As he handled ammunition, Andy heard the constant calling of sighting orders, and empty brass shell casings yanked hot from the breech rolled smoking upon the deck.

"Give 'em hell! Give 'em hell!" a gun crew officer was shouting. "Keep their periscope down!"

Andy kept watching for it to reappear, but never saw it again. All shelling stopped abruptly as a destroyer closed in. The silence seemed to hang in the air as she sped across the target area, water splitting into foam along her bow, her Y guns launching depth charges from either side while others rolled from stern chutes. A sister was coming in equally fast from another angle. Andy could feel his ship shake with each detonation, and once the second destroyer's stern was thrown almost clear of the waves.

The *Covington* had sounded abandon ship. Aboard her there seemed to be mostly confusion. She listed so heavily that only port side lifeboats could be launched. Some of her crew were busy with these; others were throwing life rafts over the rail. Rafts had already drifted bobbing away from the ship, and among them were dots of men swimming. A third destroyer came in and began picking them up, and the *DeKalb* stood by to assist if called upon. The rest of the convoy had vanished northwest into closing darkness. Half an hour went by and the executive officer passed word the *Covington* had stopped settling and would be towed to port. Shortly after that the *DeKalb* got underway. It was too dark to see more, but the engines settled down to full speed.

Robbed of his first rest period by battle duty and fatigued numb, Andy slept through the second as though drugged. Morning had come bright

and clear when he went on duty, but waves were still rising higher than normal. A spring-like dampness pervaded the air, telling they were in warm waters. Must have run well north to hit the Gulf Stream so soon. There was smoke off their port bow, and he paused to study the outline of the ship's mast before entering the pilothouse.

"We've caught up with one of them," he said to the man he was relieving. She looks like the *Matoika*."

"Right."

"Hear anything more on the *Covington*?"

"Radio room said she sank in sight of land. They lost three men in the compartment that took the torpedo. She wasn't carrying wounded."

"That was lucky," Andy said. He examined the charts. "Course 280. Zigzag by plan six." He took over the wheel. "Know what port we'll go to for our next load?"

The sailor stepped back. "They don't let me say." He stretched and yawned. "If they did we'd hit the Statue of Liberty right on the candle. My girl in Brooklyn's waiting for me—I hope."

He yawned again and went out, and Andy was alone before the view of undulating sea and of sky. He grasped the spokes loosely, for in the light breeze the *DeKalb* performed without effort. Her engines pounded away with monotonous ease, and behind her the wake churned up by her drivers stretched away and widened. In the distance it became ocean again as the sea rolled on—an ageless, never-resting transparency of depthless blue, decked with whitecaps and lashed with pure white foam.

Chapter 60

News of the docking of the *DeKalb* at St. Nazaire had reached the United States by wireless before she sailed for return. While Andy at sea debated omitting in his letter to Phil mention of sickness and hospitalization as requested by Shannon, governmental notification of his arrival in France was delivered to the Garwood mailbox. It was a postal card exactly as they had received for Bob months before. "Pvt. John Shannon Garwood" had been typed into an open blank above the words: "The ship on which I sailed has arrived safely overseas."

Phil came in early from the field that afternoon, for Hendricks were giving an evening party for their son, Emery, home on furlough. It was a warm, still autumn afternoon, and Phil left the horses unbridled to snort and play a moment at the tank while he went to the kitchen for a drink

from the water bucket at the sink. Maggie brought the card at once from the window sill where she had placed it.

"They're both across now," she said.

Phil looked at the anxiety which had never left her gentle brown eyes or the work lines of her face after Bob came home in uniform. Her worry seemed to have multiplied many times since morning. "It can't be helped, Mom," he said. He reached to squeeze her hand at her side and saw it held the family Bible, closed over one finger to mark a page. She saw his inquiring glance at the Book.

"I'm reading to see if it tells when the war will be over," she said. "Mrs. Hendricks says it does."

Phil started to say: "You won't find out in that thing," but caught himself. Of late years strange inner qualms rose to trouble him when he would have scoffed at Maggie's simple faith. He looked at her, then out through the doorway. The horses had finished at the tank and were walking, switching, toward the barn. They would rub their sweaty harness against the sides of stalls, perhaps breaking straps, and Phil went to take care of them.

Maggie had done the milking and other chores. They ate a light supper lunch at the kitchen table, for there would be ice cream and cake at the Hendricks party. Phil knew that Maggie was thinking only of Bob and Shannon, and he did not mention them, fearing to move her to tears. Phillip did not get home from the country school until they had nearly finished eating. Phil felt relief at Maggie's change of concern when she said accusingly to the boy, "You're late again."

"Me and Wart Freeman went hunting places to set traps as soon as the weather gets cold," Phillip said. "I'm gonna meet him at the corner to walk across pastures to Hendricks' and look for skunk holes. Furs'll be six dollars this winter!" He swallowed a few bites as soon as he set down his lunch pail and was ready to leave again.

"You change your clothes before you go," Maggie ordered.

Phillip turned back reluctantly to the bedroom for clean overalls and shirt, then grabbed a cold chicken leg from the table and was gone.

"He's just like Shannon," Maggie said. "He never settles down for a minute—except sometimes with a book."

"Kids are kids," Phil said. He finished his coffee and went to hitch their driving mare to the light buggy. Phil still had no car and vowed he never would, though Phillip kept hinting for one.

They drove off at a slow trot on the mile and a half of dusty road to the Hendricks farm. Over the landscape slanting rays of evening sunlight fell upon the full-grown grove Phil had planted and across the creek

of younger trees where rains had washed seeds and nuts farther and farther along the ravine each year. In silence he remembered that other sunset long ago and the barren snow-covered plot into which he had chopped holes to plant the first nuts—and of Andy arriving to interrupt his work and of the sleigh ride to the country schoolhouse Grange meeting on railroads. Now there were tilled fields of brown corn and green winter wheat stooling, and the whole countryside was full of warm, tranquil colors of frosted foliage.

Autos and other buggies were in the Hendricks yard when they arrived. More were still coming. Some were driven by late teen-aged boys who had brought their best girl friends and held their young heads and shoulders soldierly straight.

"They think they're men already," Phil said, "now that the draft has been lowered to eighteen."

He let Maggie out in front of the house. "There'll be socks and sweaters to knit," she said, and went at once inside. She had joined the local Red Cross chapter because of her mastery of knitting and was one of those teaching the handicraft to younger women.

Phil tied his horse and went toward the porch where older men in blue new overalls and starched shirts were taking turns cranking ice cream freezers. He walked slowly. Somehow news of Shannon's arrival overseas and Maggie's distress had left him feeling low with misgivings. The men would talk of the war and slackers or higher grain prices. He could see Henri Loubet there and already waving his hands, and Phil wished suddenly that he had stayed home.

Jeremy Hendricks saw Phil approaching first and greeted him. Then Mike Kelly turned his head also and hailed him.

"I seen in the paper where Bob's shot down another German plane. That's his second, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Phil. "I read that." He took his seat among them.

"I knew that boy would make good anywhere when I gave him the job running my engine," Kelly said.

"Golly but you must be proud of him," Addison said. "What does he write you about it all over there?"

"He doesn't say much about the war."

Kelly nodded approval of Bob's modesty. "I wish he'd drop some bombs on Berlin."

"A thousand right on top the Kaiser's palace!" cried Henri.

"We haven't got close enough for that yet," Jeremy said.

"No, but the time's coming," said Joel.

Phil leaned his back against a porch post and tried not to listen. He was proud of Bob, but not after the manner of this talk.

Out in the large yard space between house and barn where lanterns had been hung the older set of young folks were forming a circle for a game of *Drop the Handkerchief*. Phil watched Emery Hendricks, his soldier's hat jauntily tipped, light up a cigarette brazenly before the new preacher who was much opposed to smoking, and soon a dozen other boys had followed Emery's example. Clarence and Hal arrived together, both families crowded into Clarence's new Ford. They came up the walk in a group, and as Effie and Electra went on inside, little Johnny Feldtmann broke from his mother and ran to his grandfather. Hal grinned as Phil tossed him into the air and then set him on his knee.

"Oscar calculates it'll take the Huns a year yet to begin to see they can't win," Ez Karns was saying, "and then another one to get them whipped."

"He's been over there long enough to know," Joel said.

"I hope it ends sooner," Hal said soberly, as he sat down.

"We all do, but them Dutchmen are bullheaded."

"The old Kaiser won't let them quit as long as he has any soldiers left," Henri said.

"You bet he won't," Joel said, "'cause he knows we're going to hang him."

Henri looked directly at Phil and his voice rose in pitch and volume. "Hanging's too good for the bastard. He ought to be burned at the stake!"

Phil looked back with lips curled in unwavering silence, and it was Jim York, who answered Henri. "No. I don't believe in torturing nobody. Just hang him like any murderer."

Jeremy Hendricks looked at his son in uniform out in the yard and then at York. "He ain't like other murderers."

At that Henri raised both hands into the air. "The Kaiser's a thousand times worse than anybody before! Look at the way he's made his soldiers kill Belgian women and children!"

"They've stopped killing the girls," Joel said. He halted, looked about to see if there were women near, and lowered his voice. "They rape all the girls and make them have babies to send back home so there'll be new soldiers growing up for the German army. I read that in a published letter from an American soldier!"

"Phillip's got a gur-rl! Phillip's got a gur-rl!"

Phil sat up in relief at the interruption and with the other men turned to the hubbub which had broken loose in the yard. A group of small boys were trooping toward the gate, herding along in front of them an em-

barrassed Phillip and Bruno Haeckel's granddaughter in yellow braids and ribbons.

The boys, headed by Wart Freeman, had been entertaining themselves throwing rocks at owls which screeched in the woodlot grove, and were returning to see if the ice cream was ready when they caught the pair walking hand in hand.

"There yuh go, soon as my back's turned," Wart railed at Phillip, "and I was lookin' all over for you."

"Phillip's got a gur-rl. Dorothy's got a fel—ler!"

As Phillip was hurried up the walk with the girl toward the amused menfolks, he saw Clarence and Hal both grinning at him and hung his head. Dorothy Haeckel held hers high. In the good light of porch lanterns she broke away and whirled with a suddenness that made her braids and her dress swirl. Her blue eyes flashed above red spots on her cheeks.

"Well, what of it? You darn teases!" Her eyes glistened hotly. "Come on, Phillip."

Phillip hung back, and she darted into the house alone.

The boys quieted quickly and sheepishly, having seen that they had brought her to tears, and Phillip was accepted back into the clan. They all hung around close to the porch waiting for the ice cream; and other little girls, seeing the boys at hand, came out of the house to be teased. The boys hid behind bushes and in dark corners and jumped out with blood-curdling yells to frighten them. They stole ice chips from the freezers and sneaked up to drop them down the backs of girls' dresses, then howled with jeers and laughter at the screeching and wriggling of the victims.

The refreshments were served in the house, and Phil was asked to help and handed his baby grandson, now sleeping, over to Electra. The young men and women who came in packed both the wide, country house living room and dining room. They drew numbers for partners in eating, and Emery Hendricks got his fiancée's.

"That was a crooked frame-up!" Phil heard another girl whisper indignantly. "He wouldn't just happen to get *her* number."

From the kitchen doorway where he passed along trays of ice cream and cake, Phil watched the glances girls gave to Emery in his new uniform. Yes, it's true, he thought. The service boys can have their pick of them. The question was: would they choose wisely.

After the interval of eating, Maggie was led to the center of the living room by Mrs. Hendricks: "I want to present the lady who has knitted more socks and sweaters for our soldiers than anyone else in this community!"

Maggie was forced to stand, twisting in embarrassed pleasure through

applause, and Phil knew he flushed also. After Maggie sat down a group started singing war songs around the piano, and she was up again to join them. Her voice rose rich and strong, and it seemed to Phil everyone except himself felt like singing. He wished more than ever he had not come.

Finally Mike Kelly was called to the porch to auction off a donation of cakes and pies, proceeds to go to the Red Cross. The suspended lanterns waved to and fro, throwing long, moving shadows on the shrubbery while Mike balanced exhibits above his head and rattled off pleas for bids.

"Here's a liberty cake, ladies and gentlemen—has the word printed right across it in red, white and blue frosting. A heap of precious sugar went into this. Now what am I offered?"

"Five dollars."

"Five dollars I have! That young man must know who baked this cake! Who'll make it six. Good, six I have. Now seven."

Like other men, Phil bought a huge cake and turned it back for resale. Maggie bakes better ones anyway, he thought, and when the last articles had been sold he called her from the kitchen, where she had helped wash dishes. They were among the first to leave.

As they crossed the yard they passed Emery, hitching to his buggy to take his sweetheart home. Phil gave him a hard, sincere grip of the hand. "The best of luck to you," he said.

"And tell Shannon and Bob hello for us," Maggie requested.

"I sure will, Mrs. Garwood, if I run across them," Emery promised.

"He won't see our boys," Phil said, a trifle impatiently as he helped Maggie into their own buggy.

"Well, he might. I wanted to tell him just in case," Maggie said.

Phil did not try to answer. He knew Maggie's concept of geography. To talk to her of armies of millions thousands of miles distant was like speaking of another planet.

Phillip was again walking to be with Wart and some of the boys; and Phil and Maggie drove as they had come, alone and in silence.

They were home and unbuttoning their shoes by the coal oil lamp in the kitchen when Maggie spoke her thoughts, and there was a catch in her voice.

"Do you think—our boys will forget themselves over there, Pa?"

Phil turned his head to look at her for clarification. "Huh?"

"I meant—well, I could see that Mrs. Hendricks was worried about Emery. Mrs. Addison says most of the French women are bad and they run after American men."

"I don't suppose the boys will be very moral, most of them," Phil said. "They get to figuring they may be killed next day anyway, so they're

going to have a good time while they can—or what they call a good time.” For Phil she had mentioned one of the unalterable infirmities of human nature, and he dismissed it. As they rose barefoot to go to the bedroom, he paused before blowing out the lamp. “I wonder how soon that kid will be home. I’d leave the light burning if I thought it would be soon.” He hesitated a moment but extinguished it.

Phil thought it was Phillip’s arrival which aroused him an hour later. The illusion persisted only a second, before he became aware that Maggie was not in her place beside him. There was a low murmur of words audible, and through dim light he saw her kneeling at the window. Phil breathed gently and lay still. Maggie’s head was bowed over her hands clasped on the sill. “Dear God, they’re good boys. Care for them, and please bring them home again.”

Chapter 61

By mid-summer Ludendorff’s “peace storm” which had rushed Chet Freeman and the 89th Division overseas had been halted in Picardy, along the Lys, and at Chemin des Dames by combined strength of French and British armies without involving the main American force. But the Allies were left too weakened for immediate retaliation. Until September fighting remained at a comparative standstill all along the Western Front.

In terms of outcome, the war was essentially decided. The Meuse-Argonne was still to be assailed, the Hindenburg Line to be pierced and finally over-run, but before all that German forces had already begun gradual withdrawal. While the Allied autumn offensive hastened retirement of the foe, that last bloody drive is no tribute to Foch’s military talents nor to the fresh foolhardy confidence of American commanders with overwhelming superiority in man power. The Argonne battle served only to enlarge slaughter and destruction. For German soldiers in ranks knew they had lost the war before the Argonne commenced as surely as they did on November 11th. Their food was running low, their equipment scanty and worn. The concentration of energy for the last great drive they could muster had flowed away with their blood and munitions. They knew their armies were slowly retreating.

Ludendorff himself felt the mood of that unpleasant reality after Amiens, where on August 8th the first German units rebelled and cursed the relief filtering in to occupy their places; and he advised peace by diplomacy and peace quickly.

Ludendorff knew that inevitably the Allies would attack on a large

scale because of their persevering will to carry on whetted by an enemy who was giving way. Although he knew that and advised peace, and peace negotiations were started, he was helpless to halt the carnage of the Argonne which ensued—while the slow, dragging chain of diplomatic machinery ran its meaningless course.

During the lull after the German spring drives, Pershing began clamoring for an American army commanded by American officers, but the Cantigny success in regimental strength was too small to convince Foch. The quiet Western Front now extended from Nieuport on the North Sea to the Swiss border a little east of Belfort, with a big, new bulge pushed southwestward in the direction of Paris. From there it curved backward behind impregnable Verdun. The line was irregular. The nature of terrain and points of strategic value had resulted in salients. A sizable one, the Salient of St. Mihiel, was chosen to be pinched out by the Americans as a decisive test of their fighting ability.

For this Pershing chose his veteran 1st and 2nd Divisions, and they swiftly reduced the salient. The 1st and 2nd fought with some aid from the 89th Division, in which Chet Freeman with the 353rd Kansas regiment saw his first action. After the battle the 89th remained in line on the quiet Moselle sector of the flattened salient while the American First Army was organized and put in position for its part in the great Allied offensive. By September 25th, American troops had taken over that section of front extending from the 89th on the Moselle to the western edge of the Argonne Forest. Before the Argonne, where it was to open the Allied attack, the First Army numbered fifteen divisions, reserves included. An amassment of 350,000 Americans! Of this tremendous aggregate nine divisions were in line. The American blow was to be coordinated with a diversionary assault by Haig's British Army near the sea. If promising success developed from the American Argonne attack, battle action was to be gradually extended to include the whole front. Foch did not believe Pershing's attack would succeed. "Your offensive will fail," he predicted, "but you may try."

Plans for St. Mihiel and the Argonne were made while Shannon was recovering from pneumonia at St. Nazaire. From the *DeKalb* he had gone to one of the big, bare reception rooms of the army emergency hospital to which stretcher cases were taken. There he lay until night, one among rows and rows of khaki cots on which men died within arms length of helpless comrades before he was checked and given an opiate by doctors screening the hopeless patients into dying wards. Shannon had never known any awakening so wonderful as that to which he opened his eyes next morning

to find himself in a real hospital bed with white sheets. He had been placed beside a window through which sunlight was pouring out of a very blue sky. He turned his face to the pane and felt such an intensity of joy in being alive that tears glistened in his eyes, and for the next several minutes nothing could have induced him to tear his gaze from that sunshine and sky which made the past days seem like a prolonged, horrible nightmare.

Shannon wriggled his toes, opened and shut his hands, and presently stretched weakly for the tingling muscular pleasure of movement. He heard an outbreak of welcoming greetings from men nearest the main entrance, looked and saw that it had opened for a row of breakfast carts pushed by nurses, and realized that he was hungry.

Shannon regained strength rapidly. During his last days of recuperation his first mail overtook him, including three letters from Janis arriving together and one from Chet addressed to Camp Funston and forwarded back overseas. Because he was writing from a hospital address, Shannon began each answer with the assurance that he was feeling well now, and he told of meeting Andy aboard ship and described as much about his voyage as army censors would allow. He read Janis's letters over and over in the order in which she had written them, the first love letters he had ever received, before he started his own to her. He wanted to tell of the joyful ache they made him feel and the hunger and longing for her brought to him. He stated it, stared at the sentences and marked them out, rewrote and marked them out again. At length he closed the pages almost in despair. "Everything I wanted most to say sounded so clumsy and barren when I looked at the words that I couldn't copy them. I can't write wonderful letters like yours that make me see you and almost believe you are here. God, how I wish you were! All I can think of to say is I love you. I can't fill up pages with that just over and over, but there isn't anything else. Darling, darling! I love you!"

To Chet, Shannon wrote with ease and relief after his struggle over Janis's letter. From news bulletins on the 89th at St. Mihiel he supposed Chet had been in the thick of battle. He felt envious of his friend's experience and told him with a touch of loneliness and eagerness that he hoped to rejoin him soon. "I could have been there for the fighting with you if it hadn't been for this damned flu and pneumonia. Save a few Germans until I come. I probably sound like an idiot to you by now, but I'd like to get near enough to the front to live a while in a trench and hear a shell explode before this war is over."

The day after Shannon wrote Chet, he was pronounced fit for service and, according to his orders for return to the 89th, sent to a forward re-

placement depot behind the now inactive Moselle front. He arrived just after dark the night the big attack on the Argonne commenced.

The truck that transported his group went forward as far as the river bluffs where it unloaded, and the troops reported into a re-conditioned dug-out with lamps and wall maps. Shannon was assigned to a camouflaged tent newly set up. The soldiers unrolled their packs and made up their cots in total darkness. The night was warm and clear without any sounds of war. Shannon stretched out fatigued but securely happy in thought of seeing Chet next day and fell into sleep. He was awakened still some hours before daylight by the heavy roll of artillery.

There was no mistaking it for far-off thunder which it resembled, and little shivers ran through Shannon from fingers to toes. He felt reassured after a startled moment that his area was safely distant. His cot felt warm and his body not fully rested; but when he tried to relax into new sleep he could not. That steady tumult possessed an insistent, electrifying quality both beckoning and frightening, because it stirred to life within him strong basic emotions he had not known man possessed. His mind told him he was fortunate to be safe away from the bombardment, and yet he longed to be in the midst of it. He thought of the tales Chet and other soldiers would have of their parts in action and of John Freeman's and Andy's stories of the Civil and Spanish wars, while he had nothing yet to tell the folks back home.

He heard comrades also twisting and turning in blankets and soon sat up and searched out a cigarette. He lighted it with the match flame shielded under his blankets and left the tent.

Outside he saw dim forms of soldiers standing about and red coals of numerous cigarettes, but nobody was talking. Shannon joined a group who had ascended the slope for a better view. That same uncertain darkness which had marked the approach of dawn so often for him and Chet in their duck blind lay heavy over the French landscape. It seemed to extend endlessly upward, blackening sky and enfeebling stars. Behind him to the westward on the big map bulge which the German spring offensive had driven down from the north, a steady volume of thunder rolled. There the horizon was red, not with a warm glow of color like a sunrise, but lighted by continuous flickering which revealed a low pall of dust and smoke. The ceaseless flashes looked like intense heat lightning behind a distant cloud bank. This had to be something big from the hundreds of guns firing over there.

Presently in the other direction eastern bluffs above the Moselle River became outlined against the horizon. As daylight grew stronger the valley became a broad, untroubled sea of mist. He thought of Chet somewhere

in front of him just back from a night raid across the river. No doubt there had been probing raids to keep the Germans off guard to the real point of battle. He had not arrived in time to go on those and now he would probably never go, if the secret was out. Shannon knew it was out for sure when he went to headquarters dugout and saw news bulletins just posted of the big Argonne attack.

During the day the firing became irregular, fading in one area and rising in another. At the depot men for replacements left faster than others arrived. That night as the artillery hammering set in again it began to rain.

On the morning of September 29th came orders, rushed down through regiment, for scout and runner replacements for the 1st Division, which had been moved into reserve near Blercourt to pinch-hit at the point of greatest resistance. Shannon and Corporal Ellis, a chubby boy from the same tent, were among the few in the proper category and ordered to report before the dugout. They stood side by side in the column for roll call without knowledge of where they were going, and Shannon supposed it was to join Chet.

A Lieutenant Eastman took command of the platoon. It was raining when they left with full battle equipment. They were transported by trucks as far as the Meuse, where they were stopped at an MP check post.

Shannon and Ellis stuck their heads out from under their truck's canvas to see Eastman step down from the cab and present his papers. "This is an urgent mission."

The MP sergeant shook his head. "Sorry, lieutenant, but I got my orders too."

"Let me talk to your unit commander."

"Okay, if you say so, sir." The sergeant motioned their two trucks out of the traffic line into a muddy field.

Shannon watched an MP captain in a wet slicker slosh up. He too read Eastman's papers. "These are no good in this area. They must be countersigned by an officer from our divisional staff."

"It's urgent," Eastman said again. "This request for scouts was cleared all the way down through corps for the 1st Division."

Shannon's eyes opened in full attention. The 1st Division! Then he wasn't headed for Chet and his old company. At the same time that the dismaying realization passed through his mind Shannon heard the MP captain say: "It wouldn't make any difference if you were going to see General Pershing. There is too much forward traffic on my section of road, and your trucks would have to turn around at Blercourt and come back again through it all."

"I'll take my men on afoot if I have to," Eastman said, "but you will be responsible for the delay."

"I am not afraid of responsibility, lieutenant."

Shannon saw Eastman's face flush. He turned away and called the men out of the trucks. Shannon thought of protesting his unexplained transfer from the 89th and knew in the instant of the thought that it was too late—if a protest ever would have changed anything. They adjusted packs and slickers, fell in line and started off. As far as Shannon could see along the road there was an unbroken stream of vehicles. Where the hell was he going now?

"I wouldn't have believed there were so many trucks in the whole army," Ellis said to him, "and that damned captain wouldn't let us put in just two more."

Shannon did not answer but tramped along in morose silence. The goddam army had loused things up for him again.

The men did not walk far through the pelting drizzle. When the first caravan of canvas-covered supply trucks overtook them they strung out alongside and swung aboard wherever there was room to slide drenched bodies under tarpaulins. But after a few miles the road forked and the trucks turned right and they had to get off again.

All the rest of the afternoon their column tramped along through showers. Shannon's feet slipped and sank, and the gumbo mud clung to his shoes in great leaden gobs.

Behind Shannon Corporal Ellis's round, pink-cheeked face grew red all over and wetter from sweat than rain. "That son-of-a-bitch'n MP captain," he shouted at last, and grinned at once in relief. At their head Lieutenant Eastman faced backward and grinned also.

"It couldn't be helped, men, but there'll be hot chow and tents when we get there."

It was near dusk when they turned left three miles from Blercourt according to an American military sign post. The new road was rutted worse than any over which they had come, and Shannon saw Eastman and Sergeant Helm looking at the wheel tracks. They came around a hill curve into sight of the camp ground as darkness set in, and the big field was empty. The men stopped and looked at each other and at their officer. Eastman gazed and then started them on again. In the camp ground they found latrine pits still open and area markers still up. Even the mud looked freshly wallowed. Now Eastman swore outright at the MP captain. "If the bastard had let us through we'd have got here before they all left!"

The platoon took shelter in a deserted shed. They built a fire in the doorway, punctured their ration cans, and heated them in embers. After

eating and smoking, Shannon and Ellis spread their blankets together and lay down. Ellis relaxed, but Shannon raised himself on his elbow for still another cigarette and listened to the cannonading, more distant than from the Moselle. He turned on his side at length to think of Janis. But instead it was image of his father that came to mind, sitting at home at the noon table pinching his mustache and staring before him over the letter from William Jennings Bryan offering a Washington job. Didn't life get mixed up sometimes! And Chet—hell, he probably wouldn't see him again till they both got home to Kansas. Or maybe he would. He still had his copy of his original orders designating him as part of the 89th. Somewhere he might get a chance to present them to someone with sense and authority to straighten things out. By that time he might have as much to tell as Chet could tell him. That last thought was the only compensating one of all those he had had that day. It was the one upon which he ground out his cigarette and his tired body dropped thinking for sleep.

Next morning Shannon awakened with the others to the rip and grind of the first trucks of a new outfit arriving to occupy the reserve area vacated by the 1st Division. A muddy staff car with a non-com driver and a major drove up to their shed. Eastman went out to talk to them, and the men followed with their blankets to air them in the sunlight, pleasantly warm through low clouds. Shannon saw the major look curiously from Eastman to his dirty, unshaven soldiers. "The 1st Division is on its way to relieve the 35th," he said.

"Where is the 35th?"

"On line in the First Corps."

Eastman took out his map. The two of them opened it across the hood of the car, and the major tapped a point with a finger tip. "Here's Neuville. That was the area they were heading for."

"Maybe we can overtake them if we cut across country," Eastman said.

"You better inquire before you go in too far over there, lieutenant. It's a mixed up mess, and the Boche might be any place. That 35th has been catching hell for four days."

Shannon sensed some of the men around him stiffen. Eastman folded his map. "We're out of rations, too."

The major shook his head. "I can't help you on that till our kitchens get here."

"We can't wait," Eastman said. He turned to his platoon. "Roll your packs."

On the march again the air felt sultry hot, and overhead the broken layer of yellowish-gray clouds thickened and lowered. By the time their

ragged column intersected the one road angling westward more rain had come. The traffic seemed to Shannon worse than the day before. He and Ellis got aboard one of the snorting trucks and backed underneath the canvas. Shannon lay on his empty stomach across a flat-topped wooden carton. Its surface was too short for his length so that his legs bent almost straight upward at the knees, toes resting against other boxes stacked higher behind. His face and part of his helmet stuck outside, and water dripped continually from the front of the metal rim. Beside him Ellis managed to withdraw entirely under canvas until the driver of the truck behind thrust his head around the windshield and glared at Shannon. "Tell that fat-assed son-of-a-bitch to keep his head out where I can watch him!"

"You heard that, didn't you?" Shannon called back under the canvas.

"I'm coming." Ellis grunted as he twisted about and crawled back. "This is a chow truck!" he whispered.

"Let it alone, or you'll get us all kicked off into the mud again."

The road was out of artillery range, but they had entered a deserted trench area, and from all along their right came noise of the guns. The trucks crawled jolting, swaying and splashing mud. Rain falling on hoods of the heated engines rose again in steam. After a while they stopped at an intersection to give passage to a string of ambulances with big red crosses. As soon as these were by, Shannon's caravan turned north on a new road that carried two-way traffic. Almost at once the terrain changed. Trench walls on either side had been newly crumpled by shell fire, the wire torn and the earth pocked with holes half water filled. Shannon began to see detachments of engineers at work trying to keep the road grade passable, but more and more often there were halts. The trucks had dug down until they dragged and had to be hauled across low spots by windlass, in spite of stone and timbers scoured from the countryside and dumped into the ruts.

A long, French staff car came up from behind, skidding and dodging its way past vehicles. Half an hour later they came up with it mired. It had tried to turn around and slipped off the grade. The rear wheels hung over into the drainage ditch, and the car rested on the chassis not quite blocking the road. Shannon's truck halted momentarily beside it. The driver was kneeling in the mud and rain trying to dig out. He stood up and motioned for assistance, and from up and down the American column Shannon heard a roar of jeers. "The war has to stop for him! Push that damned crate into the field!"

A short, heavy-shouldered civilian wearing a derby hat stepped from under the dripping, mud-spattered tonneau followed by an English officer in military topcoat. They stood still side by side oblivious to the rain and

looked up and down the road at the traffic scene. Shannon glanced at the man in the derby and then stared incredibly at the stubborn jaw and fiercely curving bar mustache. It took him a moment to connect the face with Fourth of July newspaper pictures of Pershing and the French Premier!

The Frenchman spoke, precisely and contemptuously as if issuing a verdict. "The Americans have no army. They are a mob."

The Englishman answered something. "Montfaucon—" His words were lost in the roar of the truck's engine and the rip of gears. He stepped backward, throwing an arm across his face against two streams of slushy mud that spewed up behind the spinning rear wheels, splattering him and his companion.

Ellis howled with delight. "That damned Frog—criticizing our system!" he said. "They couldn't do the job themselves."

"I'll bet that was Clemenceau!" Shannon exclaimed.

"Clemenceau who?"

Shannon did not have chance to answer. The rising howl of the first enemy shell he had ever heard came rushing toward them, and there was an explosion in the field to their right. A geyser of mud and water leaped up and seemed to stand momentarily as a column before breaking and coming down. He felt muscles shrink and shiver all the way along his spine. "Jesus Christ!" he said. He looked at Ellis and saw the usually pink skin white across the corporal's cheek bones and bridge of nose. "We're getting nearer to somewhere."

When their trucks halted in the next traffic jam, Sergeant Helm trotted along the column shouting: "Fall off, gang." He took a quick roll check.

"Let's go, men," Eastman said. "From here we'll hoof it." They filed off across what had once been a barley patch.

In line Ellis's stomach bulged too much even for his plump build. When they were out of sight of the vehicles, he reached inside his slicker and brought out a bar of chocolate and a carton of cigarettes for Shannon. "I didn't have time to get more."

Saliva filled Shannon's mouth as he unwrapped the candy. "Thanks!"

They tramped on, following a valley with forested bluffs and hills on their right. From up in those woods came distant echo of scattered rifle and machine gun fire, the first of it the platoon had heard, and occasional shells passed over from either direction. A mile farther the valley curved and was crossed by a road leading toward the front. That road was empty. Yet at spaced intervals shells fell on it where it came down over higher land of bare bluffs on their left. When the platoon rounded the valley curve into sight of the creek's road crossing, everyone stopped

automatically. The shells overran the little valley itself, but down in the flat basin guns, trucks and caissons were stalled three or four abreast, and others had been trundled out into the fields.

Eastman led on into the middle of the congestion and halted to talk to a major. Shannon listened and got the gist. Hell no, he knew nothing about the 1st Division.

"It's supposed to relieve the 35th," Eastman said.

The other stopped and looked at him. He swung his arm in the direction they had been traveling. "The 35th was over that way, but they say it's been shot to pieces." There hadn't been a vehicle in or out to communicate since morning, he went on. The only bridge had blown up with the first truck to cross it, and since then the enemy had been hitting the road behind. The infantry in the hills were supposed to have driven him back beyond artillery range, but the reports were false or he had counterattacked and re-established. "If a Boche plane spots this snarl and signals the batteries, they'll start dropping them in here before we get the bridge fixed."

Eastman nodded. "I was headed in the right direction, and I'm getting to hell on out in case they do." He motioned to his platoon and led off at almost a trot.

Chapter 62

"The 35th is catching hell! The 35th is catching hell!"

Shannon heard that wherever Eastman made inquiry after entering the First Corps territory near noon, and each time he saw the men glance stealthily at one another's faces. Yet no one could tell them where to find the 1st Division.

After passing the creek road zone of enemy shell-fire, Eastman had edged farther away from the bluffs with their sounds of fighting. The platoon traveled the open countryside of empty, battered trenches and torn wire where German forward positions had been. No trucks crossed the area for roads were gone. There were only occasional columns of infantry moving up toward the darkly forested hills on the right and files of litter bearers coming back, some accompanied by walking wounded—dirty, scraggy-bearded, dazed men moving slowly. Now and then high overhead an airplane passed in one direction or the other.

In the early afternoon they approached a peasant hut with a staff car standing beside it. Shannon stared at the car, wondering how any vehicle could have gotten there across such terrain.

Part of one wall of the mud-calked hut had been blown out and the opening used for entrance, but the remainder of the building stood solid. Inside at a small table covered by an open battle map sat a brigadier general and a major, both in clean uniforms, in argument with a ragged colonel across from them. A captain with a hand in a blood-dried bandage came forward from a corner group of furtive, silent, company grade officers to meet Eastman as he entered.

Outside, the platoon leaned on rifles resting. Shannon did not listen to Eastman, for he was fascinated by the pale, miserable face and twitching lips of the colonel at the table. The brigadier sat back and pushed the map from him. "Your front is so crooked it kinks!" He jutted his chin. "Why have your flanks not maintained communications? Why has your center not advanced?"

The ragged, pallid colonel turned yet whiter. He jumped to his feet, his chair scraping loudly on the stone floor. "I told you the artillery failed us. The batteries have been out of range for two days. Raw companies frittered away assaulting gun emplacements! Counterattacks and more losses. You haven't been out there to see!"

The brigadier, stiffened and flushing, rose also to his feet. The wounded captain looked from the general to the frightened, quivering face of the colonel and stepped forward quickly to announce Eastman's platoon. It seemed to take a whole long moment for the colonel to comprehend him.

"Replacement scouts and runners?" he repeated. "For the 1st Division? Well then, send them to the 1st Division! Christ, you know where Captain Joseph's dugout is. More green men. Bah!"

The captain looked at Shannon and the gaping enlisted men. He took Eastman quickly outside and led the platoon behind the hut out of sight of the scene within. "We belong to the 35th," he said, "but the 1st has combat intelligence personnel here preparing to take over. I'll have a man take you to their post."

They left heading toward the front again. Once inside the zone of enemy artillery fire they kept to a winding communications trench. Again they could hear rifles, light mortars and machine guns on their distant right. Shannon saw their guide listen to the rising howl of each approaching shell. Twice he flopped for a near one, and the men dropped with him. Shannon had begun to feel himself walking and acting as in a dream. They entered a narrow zone of wire which, strangely, had escaped bombardment though the earth on both sides had been heavily churned. The guide turned into an undamaged trench with walls so high Shannon could no longer see over. A few minutes later they filed down steps into

a dugout. The interior was large and dry and so deep that the sounds of war were shut out with the closing of the heavy door behind them. For a moment Shannon saw nothing but outlines in the smelly light of candles. Eastman reported at a table to someone who introduced himself as Captain Joseph. The two officers shook hands.

"We missed you fellows at Blercourt," Eastman said. "Then we got lost and roamed all over hell's half-acre."

"You're in time," Joseph told him. "We're lucky to get replacement scouts at all. Colonel Heyward didn't expect any when he put through the request." He motioned Eastman to sit down. "Your men experienced?"

"No."

Shannon's eyes had begun to adjust to the dim interior, to wicker chairs and a leather cot. German posters were still on the walls, among them one of Uncle Sam and his United States being blown up by Mexicans. Shannon could not read the German inscriptions. In an adjoining room he saw men sprawled asleep on two-deck cots. He felt a nudge from Ellis. The corporal was looking toward a second room. "Jesus, food!"

Joseph glanced up. "Out of rations?"

"Since last night," Eastman said.

"The Boche left canned kraut and wieners. Their officers still seem to mess pretty well." Captain Joseph got down some cans and passed them out. "You'll have to eat cold, men, till our kitchens come."

"We'll eat it cold, sir," Ellis said.

They leaned their rifles in a corner, squatted on their heels and cut open the tins with their trench knives. Eating, Shannon's feeling of daze began to wear off.

Joseph watched them stuff their mouths until the cans were empty. "I'll give each an experienced scout to go up with," he said to Eastman. He went to the sleeping room entrance and stuck his head inside. "Sergeant Cummings, wake the men and bring them out here."

In a couple of minutes a sergeant brought in a file of soldiers red-eyed for rest. "I'm not going to take time to introduce you to our new men," Joseph told them. "Sergeant Cummings will pair you off on assignments, and you'll get acquainted fast enough." He moved the two candles on the table so that they lighted a wall map. "All of you listen and get this." He turned momentarily to Shannon's group. "If you have any questions, stop me and ask them. You have to understand and remember, because you don't write anything down up there."

Little waves of thrills chased each other from Shannon's chest down over his body as he listened to their instructions to cover the fighting front of the 35th and bring back information for relieving it.

When Captain Joseph finished, the soldiers checked equipment, filled canteens from the chlorinated water sack, and slung their gas masks.

Outside it had ceased raining and breaks in the overcast improved visibility. Shannon had drawn a companion as tall and lanky as he was stocky. They looked each other over and Shannon noticed pistol, field glasses, and a wound stripe. The other's eyes rested a moment on Shannon's rifle then searched up his sleeve to wolverine and sunflower shoulder patches. "What outfit?"

"353rd Kansas, 89th Division."

"You don't wea-ah identification up front. Tea-ah those off."

Despite fluid, Southern accent the voice was decisive and made Shannon feel foolish so that he hastened to obey. With patches off he looked again at the tall man and this time their eyes met.

"I'm Corporal Anthony Powell—Tony."

"I'm Shan Garwood."

"Okay, Shan." The corporal stuck out his hand, and his momentary grip was very hard.

Shannon and Powell were to scout the extreme left sector, their assignment to contact the 28th Division where it joined the 35th. The men left the trench in couples, radiating forward like spokes of a wheel. Ellis and Shannon waved to each other. The shivers Shannon had felt while the captain talked left after he started moving. At last it's happened to me, he thought. A tight hollowness came into his chest as he looked north, at the undulations of hills and ridges, slate colored in the mist, rising away from the Aire valley. To the west and disappearing entirely with the river into the same mist, were the forests of the Argonne. Somewhere among those hills and woods men were fighting across a strip of mud called no man's land, and he was going right in there to see it. This was something to tell about. He felt proud of thinking so calmly, and he straightened his shoulders and walked squarely beside the corporal, side-stepping wire tangles and circling holes with him stride for stride. A shell came over and Shannon cocked his head and listened to its approach as he had seen their guide listen on the way up.

Corporal Powell did not say a word until they were out of sight of the dugout. Then he stopped and looked Shannon over again. "I suppose you volunteered to come up here?"

"No, I didn't," said Shannon, speaking up quickly and defensively at Powell's tone of sardonic condescension. "I was at a replacement depot going back to my outfit when they grabbed me and sent me here."

"Then maybe you're not a damned fool after all. Now throw that rifle away."

Shannon stared at him. "It's my gun. I've signed papers for it."

"Write it off to combat loss." Powell took the Springfield from his hand and gave it a fling. It came down muzzle first in the mud and stuck, butt slanting into the air. "Get rid of your clips too. That's all bad weight in our business. We'll find you a forty-five. And on up to the line stop worrying about the heavies you hear coming. They'll go right on over." He paused, obviously watching the flush that Shannon felt heating his face and neck. Then he said more gently, "I'm in command and I want you to remember that, because I want to take you back with me. So stay at my heels and watch that you do what I do."

Powell started off and Shannon followed. After a while they stopped again while Powell studied the ruins of Charpentry through his binoculars. He did not offer to let Shannon look but replaced the glasses in their case. "There's nothing there," he said, and turned aside closer to the river.

Something over a quarter mile farther was Baulny. Powell searched it as he had Charpentry, then took the shell-pocked road leading into it. The roofs of cottages were gone. Some sections of walls still stood, and fires had gutted the debris and burned out.

The first body Shannon saw hung slumped half out of a window opening, and he felt a cringing and writhing of muscles along his back. His eyes clung to the sight of it hypnotized so that his head turned to keep facing it all the way past.

"They fought back and forth over this burg more than once," he heard Powell comment.

Shannon pulled his gaze forward. They had turned into the pitted cobblestone mainstreet, and there were other bodies, both khaki and green clad. Powell was ahead and bent over one, removing a pistol belt. A grinning, helmeted face peered directly up at Shannon from the gutter at his side. The figure rested on its ribs, the trunk blown away from the thorax down into a mess of dried entrails and blood. Shannon recoiled from it in a leap. He closed his eyes and ran, tripped over an uprooted paving stone and fell headlong. Powell helped him up.

"Hurt yourself?"

Shannon shuddered and spat a mouthful of dirty saliva mixed with blood from his lips which had ground into the gritty earth with his tumble. "No." He heard his voice before he realized he had spoken. He stared queerly into Powell's calm face, felt his own heating and dropped his gaze. The shame drove away his nausea, and he grew calmer with a kind of suffocating coldness that numbed him. His hand shook as he took out his cigarettes.

"No, no. Always save tailormades for night—if you got any."

Powell held out a sack of tobacco and a book of papers, regarding him steadily with a gaze which seemed to announce that everyone got scared. In words he said, "It's hell trying to roll one in the dark and rain."

Shannon forced his fingers steady as he filled and folded the paper. He reached into his pocket for one of his unopened packs and offered it in returning the tobacco sack. "I got extras," he said.

"Thanks."

All at once they were meeting each other's eyes squarely in understanding. Powell checked the pistol just secured and put it back in the holster. He handed it over belt and all, and Shannon buckled it about his waist. Side by side without other words they went off at a trot to get out of the village—Shannon sucking lips and spitting.

They met their first living men just beyond the outskirts, two stretcher bearers with a blanket-covered soldier on a litter. He turned his white face from side to side and moaned in unconsciousness.

"Where is the front?"

"Not far, a half-mile, maybe." They did not stop, and Shannon looked at Powell.

"It sounds closer."

Powell nodded. "You can't get anything exact asking those fellows. They've had too much. You have to go in and see." He listened to the rifle and machine gun fire all along ahead of them and then very carefully to sound of mortars pounding away on their left front. After a moment he said, "Our line follows the river," and turned left toward it. "Mud your face good."

From directly ahead came only the sound of an occasional rifle shot. The little fields had grown up into good cover of brush and weeds. Powell walked through rapidly stooping low until they approached the trees bordering the stream. He crawled the last hundred yards to a shell-chopped flood dike along which Shannon saw scattered men lying on their stomachs facing the opposite river bank. Behind these men below the dike they found a deep trench in which other soldiers squatted smoking, all units of the 28th Division.

"We've had it quiet here all day," a lieutenant told them, "ever since we gave up trying to cross. Up north where all the noise is I don't know what you'll find."

"We'll go have a look," Powell said.

"Be sure you keep out of sight of the other bank. The Boche is over there just like we are here."

They crept back into cover of the fields they had crossed and went

on parallel to the stream which curved and ran north. Powell told Shannon to wait for him when he again crawled out.

"We're getting some place," he said when he came back. "There are outfits of the 28th and 35th all mixed up together over there."

The next check he found only men of the 35th. Then the river bank became high and bare without dikes, and the line angled from it across the brushy valley into right hand bluffs and sounds of heavy firing. Powell doubled far back before crossing the valley, then went forward again into the bluff ridges toward the fighting. They leaped bare ridge tops singly, Powell always first. As Shannon went over one he heard the ear-whacking spang-crack of a close bullet and the whine of a ricochet, and it registered to him a second later that he had been shot at. He felt no terror, but suddenly charged with tremendous alertness so that when Powell said "sniper" Shannon grinned back.

"He hasn't much chance hitting at that range with a snapshot," Powell said.

"Just the same I'll keep to one side of you from here on," Shannon said.

Powell nodded. "You pick the next cover." Shannon wormed forward and raised his head very slowly into the tops of bushes. He held it motionless while his eyes searched and then just as slowly lowered himself. Powell nodded again. "You did it right."

"I learned that sneaking ducks long before the army got me," Shannon told him.

"You hunt a lot?"

"Every free day I have in the fall."

"Come down to Alabama when the war's over, and I'll take you out after wild turkeys," Powell said.

As they went on they continued to find soldiers, but there was no longer a line as such, only groups clustered together in holes and behind ridges. Powell asked them always the same questions: their regiment and company, their reserves if any, the enemy fire power and his calibers of weapons. Shannon listened and repeated answers to himself until the contradictions bewildered him. He spoke of that to Powell.

"Like I said before these fellows never know very much," Powell told him, "but out of it all and what you see, you can put together a pretty good picture. This division's about taken its limit."

The front bulged forward farther and farther as they followed it. "They've gone too damned far ahead of their flank," Powell said. He kept close watch of their left rear. From across the stream out of wooded heights which the 28th had been unable to clear, enfilade machine gun

fire swept intermittently across ridge crests, and rifle bullets ripped through torn bushes. From on ahead came thuds of mortars mixed with sharp little whing reports of Minnies. Powell worked his way toward those sounds and more and more swiftly again. "I want to get back out of this pocket as soon as I can." They crawled around bare spaces and knolls and dived over ridges. They did not even look at the bodies they passed. They dragged themselves on their bellies, faces turned sidewise and cheeks rubbing the mud. Shannon's heart pounded from exertion until it shook his chest, and his lungs gasped for air. Sweat poured down their faces, washing away camouflaging mud so that they had to plaster afresh each time before raising heads to look; and once when the sun broke through directly upon them as they crossed a knoll Shannon felt as if focused naked in its brightness. He was cold inside though his skin burned. Yet somehow fear never gripped him with its fatal seconds of hesitancy and deflection. "You're sure doing fine your first time up," Powell told him.

They climbed a last slope with a row of young poplars miraculously still standing with white trunks and pale green leaves. Behind the trees were scattered freshly dug fox-holes and an empty trench. They slid into the latter and lay panting. "They jumped off from here," Powell said. While they rested mortar fire increased suddenly to a roll, and began to be shattered by heavier reports and explosions. "88's, by God!" Powell wiped smarting sweat out of his eyes, crawled up to an embanked lookout post and trained his field glasses.

Shannon crept up beside him and peered ahead. A series of ridges sloped away before him to meet another curve of river valley filled with smoke and mist. Powell handed the glasses to Shannon. "Have a good look."

When Shannon first put them to his eyes the magnification seemed only to blur the haze. He sharpened the focus and the terrain leaped toward him. He saw a whole shifty zone of white puffs from exploding mortar shells and just above but still in the smoke the flashes of air bursting 88's. Out of that smoke came a long, disorganized line of running men. "They're coming back," he shouted.

Powell took the glasses and swept the front. "I didn't think they could take that fire without artillery support."

"Where are our guns?"

"Stuck in the mud somewhere or out of ammunition."

The retreating soldiers began arriving individually, then by two's and three's. They dropped back into the trenches they had left hours earlier and lay gasping. When they had stopped coming and some had begun

to sit up, Powell moved down the trench. When he asked questions he got blank stares from out of the lined, unshaven faces and dazed eyes. When he said he was from the rear, he got questions instead of answers.

"Where are we? How long since they shoved us out here?"

One man's gaze fixed on Shannon's sagging canteen. "Good water?"

Shannon nodded, detaching and uncapping it. The soldier seized it and tipped it to his black, cracked lips. He held it high above his red face and his whole body shook as he gulped. He had it more than half emptied before another tore it from him to drain the remainder.

Farther on a lieutenant's eyes became more comprehending when Powell mentioned relief. "How soon?"

"Tonight or tomorrow night at the latest."

"Unless it's tonight, then—"

"I'll advise tonight, sir."

"Yes, for God's sake—" The lieutenant broke off his tremulous, high-pitched plea. He swallowed with difficulty and began to look embarrassed. "Major Coughlin has battalion headquarters in a mine crater around the second hill. You can find out more from him."

Powell left at once to find the major. He glanced at the sun, lowering to the river bluffs behind breaking clouds.

Major Coughlin was shouting orders to the men reorganizing around him. Some were digging the crater and their trenches deeper. Along the ridge crest others lay prone with their rifles. Two machine gun squads had their weapons set up and were embanking their positions.

Powell went straight up to the major and tried to be clear and specific. "Combat intelligence runners from the rear, sir. We want information that will improve artillery support and—"

"The artillery! Artillery!" The major's neck bulged suddenly purple and his eyes bugged. He raised clenched fists as if to slug Powell, who swiftly back-stepped. "The sons-of-bitches. Those god damned sons-of-bitches!" For a moment the officer stopped, choking over his curses. "So they want to know where to shoot." He relaxed a little. "Tell them to fire on enemy rear lines of communications. They've killed more of my infantry than the Germans!"

"We're scouting for the 1st Division, sir," Powell told him, "for information to relieve your division sector."

"Oh." The major at once calmed measurably, listened and answered questions. When Powell had finished he said, "You can tell them my units will hold on this line through the night. We've got machine gun belts and grenades enough for that long, but not much longer without reinforcements. We've been looking for some up all day."

"We'll find out what's behind you on our way back and tell them," Powell said. "Come on, Shan. We've covered our sector."

Powell looked at his compass and headed straight rearward across country. They moved in the same fashion as they had come, crawling and darting crouched across exposed ridges. Powell hurried faster than ever but progress was still tedious, and Shannon was again streaming sweat. He looked often and longingly to the west, trying to hurry the sun which seemed to stand still on the horizon rim. Once it sank behind the bluffs they would be in shadow enough to stand up and walk.

They lay catching breath for a moment in a little grassy swale, and Shannon, looking back, was surprised at the short distance they had come. While he looked rockets in colors rose along the German line.

Powell was on his feet in a scrambling leap. "Barrage—counterattack!" He stretched to full height, looking one side and the other for cover. "Jesus—hurry!" He was off, galloping for the nearest deep shell hole. Shannon overtook him in a flying tackle dive for the rim, and they tumbled over it together, Powell sliding across a body which lay just outside. There were no more rockets when Shannon raised his head above their pit to look; then abruptly to their rear on the trenches they had left treetops reeled and tossed amidst flashes and explosions. A tall, slender poplar collapsed under a direct hit to the trunk, its whole crest folding over to hang swaying upside down by a strip of white fiber. The violence followed the timber line, and noise became a roar. It was like a tornado Shannon had once seen sweeping along a creek. Bushes and fallen branches rose and sailed through the air.

The barrage moved toward him. Shannon slid as low as he could get and flattened out. His own region became one of flying mud and bursting flashes. Pieces whizzed and sang. Then came an ear-shattering blast and one rim of their hole disappeared. Powell jerked his head and stirred. Something soft but sizable and substantial rolled down against Shannon. He pulled it over him and burrowed like a worm as a rain of wet earth fell. Another half moment and the storm had rolled past. He heard it playing on the torn, brush-covered ridges to the rear, and then it ceased. Through blank ringing in his ears he heard a thin rattle of rifle fire break out along the front and a second later the pattern of a machine gun.

Shannon started to get up. The weight upon him which he had hugged for protection was the German corpse Powell had stumbled over on the edge of the shell hole. It was faceless now with one arm gone. Shannon shrank from it, pushing it away, and sank in the mud to his knees. Then there was yelling, shouting and cursing all about Shannon as if by maniacs. A splatter of footsteps surged past above him, going toward the

line—khaki brown uniforms, the Major's long expected reinforcements at last arriving and charging to assist against the counterattack. Shannon stood up to see if there were more coming. The ridges to the rear were empty. A haze of smoke still hung along the ground where the last German shells had fallen. It looked reddish in the flat rays of the sun's disk, partly eclipsed by the western bluffs. Along the line he heard dozens of rifles firing.

Shannon had forgotten Powell until he started to get down again and saw that the corporal had not moved. He pulled his feet free of muck and crawled to his side. "Do you reckon we should go back and help fight?" He nudged Powell. "Would two more be of much use?"

There was no answer. Powell was limp with head slumping. Horrified, Shannon seized his shoulders and rolled him over. Above his temple his helmet was dented and split, and blood seeping through had spread upon the rim. He was breathing steadily. Shannon detached his canteen, recalled it was empty and threw it away with a curse. Panic for the first time swept over him. "Tony—Tony!" He began to sob, and reckless in fear shook Powell violently and rubbed his hands. Powell responded to the fierce treatment. He groaned, moved his legs and then pulled his hands from Shannon's. "I'm—all right." He opened and closed and opened his eyes, brushed his brow as if to clear his sight. "I didn't pass out all the way." He put his hands under himself, pushed, and sat up. "It was a piece of that damned shell that came so near dropping in with us. I thought the helmet had stopped it."

"It didn't go through," Shannon told him.

Powell saw the blood now dripping upon his shoulder from the rim. He unfastened the chin strap with unsteady fingers, but the dent and ragged edges driven into his scalp made the helmet tight. "Take it off for me." Powell stiffened and gritted his teeth when Shannon forced it. Then he grinned from sheer nerve.

The blood ran faster once the wound was free. Shannon covered it with his field dressing bound tight. "That stopped it," he said.

"It aches like hell." Powell got a little bottle from his side pocket and shook several white tablets out into the palm of his dirty, shaking hand, tossed them deep into his throat and swallowed them dry. "Aspirin. You ought to carry some," he said to Shannon's inquiring look, and lay back. "I have to rest a bit." A shadow fell over the landscape as the last of the sun's rim passed below the bluffs. They listened to the noise of the German attack fade out repulsed.

Powell put a hand to his bandage. "Will it be a hell of a scar?"

"It won't show much up under the hair. Don't finger it."

"Light us both a cigarette," Powell told Shannon. "I feel too damned

shaken up to move yet." When he had the cigarette between his fingers he said, "I'll be sent back now. I'm lucky."

"Yes." Shannon looked at the wound stripe on Powell's sleeve. "I'll bet there aren't many guys live to wear two of those."

"I wouldn't have lived to wear the first one except for a big, old buck sergeant at Cantigny. The lieutenant would have got us all killed trying to charge a pillbox if sarg hadn't held some of us back. He was squad corporal when he first started to train me, a big damned Yankee from somewhere in your state. He was so foul mouthed it turned your stomach. He was always drunk and he cussed us out at first till I hated his guts. But he took care of us, and he made me learn. They gave him a citation for Cantigny and bucked him on up to company staff. About that time they picked me for combat intelligence, but I never forgot that first machine gun that put one through my arm."

He showed Shannon the scar of the tiny hole. "It didn't hit a bone or hurt till it got stiff next day." Powell looked at the wound stripe as he pulled the sleeve back down. "Two are too many. I'm overdue." He put his arm beneath his head as if to keep the stripe out of sight and stared up at the evening sky, clear in a spot directly above. "I don't go for stuff about hunches on your number coming up," he said at length, talking in spurts between silences. "It's the law of averages and how many times you're exposed." Then he said, "I'm the only one left from that squad of ours besides old sarg."

The talking and smoking seemed to refresh Powell. By the time it was dark he said he could walk. "We've got to report on time."

Shannon helped him up. His first steps were wobbly, but his feet became surer as they got moving.

German artillery fire had ceased from the dark line of river bluffs. The silence immediately behind them and before them sounded strange to Shannon. As they walked he remembered Powell's earlier remark about American shortage of artillery at the front. Maybe the Germans are running short too, he thought.

Far to their left and right, however, there was no doubt of anybody's supply, for the horizon flickered and growled incessantly.

Chapter 63

They traveled back by compass, and the blasted terrain and Powell's wound made progress slow. "Remember high hills for coming out again," he told Shannon. "They'll be the only landmarks worth trusting if the artillery goes to work."

Candles were still burning in the dugout when they arrived, and heavy curtains inside the door kept the entrance dark always to the outer world. The post was regimental headquarters for combat intelligence now, with several staff officers commanded by a gray-haired colonel. Shannon's nostrils dilated to scent of coffee.

"The old man is here," Powell whispered. There was jubilant confidence in his low tone. He went directly up to the table. "Mission completed, sir." Beside him Shannon snapped to attention and saluted.

"We omit that formality up here," the colonel said. He looked at Powell's bandaged head. "Get a bad one, corporal?"

"A shrapnel crease, sir. It happened on the way back."

Powell reported for both of them except on the counter-attack. For that he turned to Shannon. "Colonel Heyworth, this is Private Shannon Garwood. He saw the reinforcements go forward. I was out for a few minutes at the time."

"How many men did you see?" Colonel Heyworth asked.

"Fifty or more. I didn't count."

"Have you anything else to add?"

"No, sir. We came straight back after that."

"Thank you both for good work." He looked at Powell. "You are released. Sergeant Whitfield will see that you get to battalion aid." To Shannon he said: "Eat and rest. Our units begin relieving at midnight. You will guide them into your sector."

Other runners were waiting to report. Shannon looked for Ellis but did not see him. With Powell he followed Whitfield into the kitchen room. There were crackers and open cans of salmon on the table. Shannon was hungry enough even for that, but Powell took only a cup of the coffee they had been smelling. "To hell with the goldfish," he said. "I'm going back where they have hot chow."

"We'll have it hot here tomorrow," Whitfield said.

Shannon sat with Powell until a first aid man came to take him to the rear. When Powell rose he removed his field glasses and held them out. "You'll be needing some and these are good ones. I got 'em off a German officer." He gave Shannon also his bottle of aspirin.

"Thanks," Shannon said. Then impulsively he added, "I'm god damned lucky it was you I went up with."

Powell smiled. "You'll do all right." He held out his hand.

When he was gone, Shannon crossed into the bunk room and lay down. He relaxed his lips which felt numb and puffy from falling on his face in the afternoon and stared at the dim ceiling. He was secure here, and he tried now to acknowledge without shame his fears at the front, just as he felt that Powell had learned to accept and thus subdue

them. Tony was a good man. For the first time in the army Shannon felt he had performed useful duty. He listened to Colonel Heyworth's questions, crisp and specific, of runners still arriving and thought of Powell's respect for him. If that was Tony's opinion, Heyworth was all right.

The platoons were outside in full battle gear when Shannon was called at midnight, some already leaving with other scouts. They seemed hard and grim, these new soldiers, and all were clean shaven as he saw by the flare of matches. Men who may have their faces torn open have no wish that the wound be mixed with a tangle of dirty beard.

It gave Shannon an invigorating thrill to walk in the lead with officers of these veterans and answer questions about terrain of the front. Now the Germans would get it. With compass, vague outline of hills and his keen sense of directions of the outdoorsman he traveled a true course. He guided out relieved units of the 35th, stupefied and beaten men who plodded without speaking even to one another and gave Shannon the uneasy feeling of being alive among robots.

As he got nearer to the dugout, he met more fresh troops getting forward, reserves to be echeloned behind the line, and when he arrived he found still others waiting to be led up.

Shannon was given a timed ten minutes for coffee. There was no resting. Movement of thousands of soldiers was underway and hours of darkness numbered. New clouds had come and as he left again a fine drizzle fell. Behind him were the whispers. Rude banter. Low curses where someone stumbled. Red coals of cigarettes stretching back without limit. After a while the terse command: "Smokes out." In the blackness Shannon could only guess the size of detachments he conducted, but there were enough, he thought, to smother any enemy. Before dawn he was to join the scouts on the line to lead in the attack, and he felt ready. Daybreak was two hours away when he returned to field headquarters the second time and reported the troops in position.

Heyworth was alone at his desk. "You may rest," the colonel told him. "There will be no attack. The order has already gone forward."

"No attack?" Shannon stood still. The army had bungled again. Disheveled, muddy and pale from strain, he could still think of the men he had led out—men ready to fight, told to lie in the mud among dead and wait. Stupidly Shannon repeated: "No attack? They'll be under fire out there."

"We must follow corps orders." The colonel nodded dismissal and lowered his own tired gaze to dispatches before him.

"How long?" Shannon bit out the words.

Heyworth looked up again and sharply. "I don't know for how long."

Shannon recognized suddenly his affront of remaining with questions. By reflex he stiffened to attention.

"At ease." Creases across Heyworth's forehead and around his eyes softened. He rose, stepped to the map on the wall and ran a finger tip all along the line of the Argonne. "This is the front and must advance intact. Over here across the river the 28th must get forward into the woods to cover our left flank. You saw that with Corporal Powell yesterday. On our right the Fifth Corps has fallen behind, and the 91st will have to be replaced over there. We all need more artillery. We couldn't know those things yesterday. This is a big battle, soldier."

"Yes, sir." Shannon stared at the map, alive for the first time to the scope of operations. "Thank you, Colonel."

Shannon slept till noon and awoke ravenously hungry. He could hear mortars and machine guns at work along the front. A field kitchen had come up, and cartons and cartons of cigarettes. He refilled his mess kit with beans and stew until he felt groggy. He stuffed his pockets with tailormades and went back to his bunk. The cigarettes he hid by packs in separate places. And he inquired of other scouts for Corporal Ellis, but nobody knew anything about him.

Sometime early in the night Shannon was called out along with everyone else in bunks. His shoes had dried stiff, but he forced them on and went into the main room, stupid from sleep, feeling bloated and with a bad taste of catsup in his mouth. A tall scout, mud from head to foot, stood in the center of the room reporting while a medic wrapped a wire cut on his forearm. "That nest got the sergeant and everybody crawling with him. It would have got me, too, if I hadn't been covering their rear. The Boche set up new guns in the bushes after dark and stretched alarm wires in front with range measured to the inch. They don't even use tracers or flares; they just let go. I located this one exactly. We can get it with a new patrol."

"Pick your men," Heyworth told him.

Shannon was wide awake in an instant with a cold weight settling into his stomach at prospect of being called. The tall scout swept the room with his gaze and chose tested veterans. They were back at daybreak, one man missing.

Next night more patrols went out, but again Shannon was not on them. He was assigned to guide infantry reinforcements to the front and helped string a telephone wire back. It was cut within an hour and had to be repaired.

For seventy-two hours the battle hung fire in grueling fashion. Along the sector where the 1st Division had dug in solid, the enemy brought up

more artillery until his shells fell around the clock, still without much answering fire. Raked from the sky by day and raided in darkness, the troops held and waited, and a steady flow of replacements went forward for the casualties. Clouds gathered or disappeared with uncanny swiftness, and between showers the sun beat down until the earth all but steamed. The men welcomed rain when it came to partly purify the air of stink of rotting bodies.

For the most part Shannon ran dispatches, and wherever he carried messages to the rear he saw strings of horses and mules dragging guns and supplies forward through mire. He knew from reports which came in that the Fifth Corps had taken immediate objectives and was holding; but across the Aire the 28th and 77th still struggled futilely against the Argonne. Some said the terrain was impenetrable, but a battalion had fought its way forward and been surrounded. Officers tried to hush rumors which spread. One attempt after another at relief failed, and somehow news of each failure leaked and traveled fast. Even in front trenches of the 1st Division men talked about it and shook their heads. "They can't last long out there alone. Their ammunition—rations." The "lost battalion" became a byword.

Then on the night of October 3rd additional columns of infantry went forward into position along the front. Behind them, Colonel Heyworth moved his command ahead into a new dugout. A battery of heavy field guns arrived as they were leaving. The artillery units took over the quarters they evacuated, and Shannon was awakened just ahead of dawn next morning by thunder of bombardment all along their rear.

The second phase of the Argonne had commenced.

Chapter 64

Shannon had never before felt so keenly and nervously alert as when he slid from his bunk and went outside to watch and listen to the pure chaos of noise. The night was cloudy black and bracing cool. Their new dugout was midway between American batteries and their target area, so that the shells rushed overhead with rising and fading moans. None were falling around him at all. The Germans were firing, but at the trenches which Shannon knew were packed with men for the jump-off. Behind him was the flicker, flicker of muzzle flashes, before him the gashes of flame which leaped and sprang all along the front. Very lights rose and burst into brilliant illumination as they floated slowly earthward. Even across the distance to the front, trees stood out in the dazzling glares,

ghostly gray and unreal in the pall of smoke. Now and then combinations of colored flares directed a deluge of shells to a point. Then the steady hammering would go on again. Shannon's ears began to ring and then to ache as he smoked cigarette after cigarette. Forgotten were all his questions of purpose to civilization. This was real war.

Grayness of dawn began to filter in upon the devastated countryside, and the bombardment shifted to a rolling barrage that moved slowly northward, here lingeringly and there with swiftness in answer to signal rockets, still bright in the fading gloom.

Shannon was among the runners sent forward for information in the forenoon. Attacking units of the 1st had advanced across the river as far as covered by artillery support and then run into a curtain of mortar and machine gun fire. Before it they dug in again. The Germans themselves had developed those very Hutier tactics Pershing now employed against them, and they had learned from the Allies in Picardy and at Chemin des Dames the best defense against it—simply to retire out of artillery range. Before the advance could continue the batteries had to be moved forward, and that offered time to bring up reinforcements for counterattacks. It was against counterattacks that the infantry had dug in. Behind them the struggle was already on to move up support equipment.

Both going out and coming in, Shannon saw horses and mules dragging carts and caissons through mud around holes with men pushing on the wheels. He counted a dozen tanks stopped at the river where engineers were trying to build a bridge. A few light guns were being floated across the Aire, chained to clumsy log rafts hauled by men with cables and windlasses. It seemed to Shannon in the few minutes he watched that half the rafts tipped over and sank.

Shannon returned and reported, and it was late afternoon before he was called to Colonel Heyworth's quarters again. When he stepped up to the table before Heyworth, he was handed a dispatch for Brigadier General Strethers of the 28th Division. He moved aside for the next messenger and buttoned his coat about the paper he inserted within, but the Colonel turned to him with a quick, cordial gesture. "It is important I have an answer soon."

Shannon straightened. "Yes, sir."

Up and out of the dugout he started off at a dog trot. This mission took him to the rear. He knew the distance from previous trips and so could gauge speed against endurance; yet he pressed himself. He wanted to better his record, fast though it had been, for Colonel Heyworth—the first officer to stir enthusiasm in Shannon Garwood. Shannon did not know whether he had been picked for this assignment, but it seemed so. He

did know that his name remained on the Colonel's personal messenger list, while other men were shifted elsewhere. He fancied Heyworth had his eye upon him, and that gave each mission a significance which made Shannon feel important to the army. Active country life of tramps afield with gun and rod and his football training had contributed a real factor which he himself did not recognize—stamina and the powerful, muscled limbs of a runner. Stripped of all equipment save his pistol, he could jog rapidly and with easy endurance that made it a pleasure and left his imagination free.

The artillery had not yet gone to work again in earnest, and mostly there was only distant machine gun and rifle fire. The comparative silence after the noise of the morning seemed gracious and clarifying to the air and to the mind. Shannon looked far ahead, beyond even the sector held by the 28th Division to the area of the 77th. If Colonel Heyworth were over there, he'd do something about that lost battalion, Shannon thought. And he pictured himself as the chosen scout to find it. He saw himself leading the relief column and after the rescue a ceremony of citation and promotion.

Presently as he trotted there broke into outer consciousness a thread of sound unlike any heard before, a hum which rippled and sang like swarms of giant beetles and grew louder. He wheeled to face it, and saw coming out of southern sky from behind American lines dozens and dozens of airplanes. Squadrons were arranged in fleets and fleets decked into layers, a magnificent armada of the air. Shannon remained struck motionless by the sight. He knew they were friendly, and they made him think of a tremendous flight of great geese. In the next moment of watching their approach, Shannon's daydreams of personal importance were shattered by recognition of what a mite his one self was among millions. It was much the same overwhelming feeling he had experienced amid the human maelstrom of New York, and a feeling lost an instant later in a wild surge of pride and excitement for his mighty army.

"They're going to help the lost battalion!" he shouted aloud. Shannon danced up and down, waving and yelling "Hurrah" to the pilots who could not possibly hear, and he tore off his helmet and threw it high.

Beautiful, straight, and swift flew the planes, their course bearing to the left. The air beat and throbbed with the rhythm of the many engines. They passed over, the volume faded, and Shannon remembered his assignment.

High on the tail of the flight, Bob Garwood rubbed at the moisture clouding his goggles, looked down at the lone speck of a figure wildly

applauding and waved back unseen. Bob was flying a French plane with improved LeRhône engine. He too was on special mission, to speed beyond the area of supply drop to the lost battalion, while the armada busied the Jerries, and photograph the defense system guarding the junction of two railways east of Grandpre.

Across the river Bob saw the first planes with black crosses rising to meet them. He counted ten and thought what fools they were to come up in such inferior numbers. No doubt more were on the way. He watched four American patrols of five ships each slip from formation and plunge to engage them. Another few miles and leading fighters began peeling off to strafe the woods while dozens of others held altitude for advantage of observation and a long dive. Behind the strafers squadron after squadron of big, slow, two-engine bombers descended with loads of ammunition and rations. Bob raised the nose of his plane a trifle, swung it on a new course, and pulled the throttle farther open. Vibration of fuselage melted into smooth-flowing tremor. As he climbed he took a last, long look back down and saw his late companions swooping, swarming, and circling over the timber. Then he was alone above an indistinct wooded landscape which unrolled slowly.

A spur rail track which the map showed running toward Apremont was visible at times, winding down the Aire valley, but indistinctly from six thousand feet. He watched it for supply trains to report on. The river itself was plain, a thread of tarnished silver with reddish sheen here and there where rays of the lowering sun broke upon it through tree tops. Bob kept it to his right until he sighted the tributary stream which came down from the north and dumped into the Aire southwest of St. Juvis. There he set his camera ready, got out a pair of field glasses upon his lap, and turned to a right oblique across the Aire. He pushed up his goggles and dropped to three thousand. He crossed three fixed defense systems in the next four miles, all extending at right angles to his course; and one after another he studied them through his glasses. A regular observer would have done a better job, but there would have been added danger in the slower speed of a two-seater.

Beyond the third defense as far as Imegourt, the country appeared clear. Bob turned west, passed Campigneulle to his left and descended another five hundred feet and followed the first system to St. Georges, taking pictures all the way. Turning back on the middle system he photographed it until it faded beyond the tributary stream. He made notation on the problem of fording the swollen Aire west of the railroad junction. Finally he flew east again over the last and southernmost system, the

most formidable appearing, and from it drew heavy machine gun and anti-aircraft fire. The plane rocked and bucked, so that controlling it made photographing difficult, and he had to climb higher. The opposition irritated without frightening him. It was hard to take good pictures when they kept you high and bouncing with their infernal blasting.

I'd like to go back after one of those batteries, he thought, at the end of the system. He hesitated, but importance of getting pictures to headquarters restrained him. He pulled up the nose, wheeled aloft and away.

The mission had taken more time than expected, and it was too late to rejoin his comrades over the Argonne. I'd better fly home east of the river he decided. No use making a silhouette against the sunset. Probably the boys pulled half the planes in Germany out over the woods.

Bob did not travel far out of his way. All we need is to see them first. He stroked the cockpit rim of the trim little airplane as if it were something living and friendly which adored petting. We can outrun anything, can't we, baby? His gaze roved constantly.

After a while the earth below leveled into more open landscape. Out of a grove emerged the gray-green of an army caravan, winding its crooked course over a gutted road between two meadows. Bob's eyes sparkled as he spotted it. The American lines were not far now. Swiftly and neatly he checked the twin machine guns. His assignment had not included strafing supply movements, but a fellow had to have fun. Carefully he searched the sky above and all about to be sure it was clear, particularly to the west where the colour was golden red and enemy ships coming out of the glare could cut him off. A grin of young, reckless excitement spread over his face.

"All right, boys," he said aloud. "Look out below!" He pushed the stick forward and opened the throttle the whole way.

Instant response of the rotary engine was deafening. Bob bent his long body low, held his breath and gritted against lightness in his stomach—swallowed to relieve pain in his ears. Wind screamed about struts and wires. Terrain in his field of vision gyrated and twisted, hurtling to meet him. He saw figures too tiny to seem humans tumble helter-skelter from toy wagons and run, and the spark-like flashes of rifles. Clatter of his machine guns broke above the din of the engine. The finder swung across its target area, wavered, and swung back. It was hard to hold the damned thing true. His bullets dug up dirt in strips. Fleeing figures stumbled, hit or tripped—fantastically leaping, scattering, disappearing figures. Horses reared with terror upsetting carts. A team of mules went completely over backward, crashing into their wagon. Then the road ahead was empty, and the plane shot up, headed for home.

Behind it animals, broken loose, galloped across country chased by drivers; others were down, kicking their harness to pieces. Bob looked back upon the havoc of the scene and laughed riotously.

Chapter 65

On October 5th a new advance by the 1st Division was halted with casualty sickening abruptness. Shannon scouted the stalled front and reported back through the heaviest flow of wounded he had yet seen. He traveled again to the left flank and brought to Colonel Heyworth an oral report of no headway by the 28th and 77th against the forest. From the Fifth Corps on their right came similar information. From general headquarters came orders to reorganize and wait once more. That night the 1st drew back to secure its flanks and dug in deep.

The Americans faced the same problem Ludendorff had encountered after penetration at Chemin des Dames, that of widening a wedge driven into the enemy system. In this case the salient had been pushed northward between the Meuse and the Argonne, and troops within were being swept enfilade fashion by cross fire from both forest and river heights. Pershing's drive had been stopped by the Germans precisely where British and French commands had predicted it would be stopped, and this should have provided the enemy with precious time to reinforce and consolidate solidly. But the German army had fought four years of war and developed fatal weakness—worn out equipment, lack of rations, and the downy-faced boys and old men drawn by thousands from reserve lists. Nightly during the interval of stalemate American replacements went forward into the salient past streams of casualties coming out, and daily threw attack after attack against wing sectors to widen the base of their wedge. It was the old bloody principle of warfare by attrition. Pershing had the man power and like Grant in the wilderness was determined to carry on; and like the South near the close of the Civil War, Germany was robbing cradle and grave.

Among American soldiers in ranks on the jostling battle line bewildered pessimism began to stir. "What's happening? We're not going anyplace. What the hell are we trying to do?" To Shannon, who thought he knew what had been attempted from study of Heyworth's battle maps, the offensive had failed; and each new order of attack became to him inexcusable murder. He blamed again that figurative pillar of responsibility, the high command. Colonel Heyworth's reports from the front were sifted and verified. They were as accurate as humans could make them

when sent up to corps, but the big generals safe there were too stubborn to admit defeat.

Among troops of the 77th discouragement was most pronounced with still no news of their lost battalion. Even from their combat intelligence posts Shannon heard nothing on it until the 28th finally drove a flanking prong into the woods above the base of the main army salient, forcing the enemy to retire and letting the 77th advance. Then relief was confirmed, and Shannon, going forward with a dispatch from Heyworth, met the remnants of the battalion enroute to the rear—a procession of litters and a little straggling line of gaunt, stupefied men in tatters and bandages. He looked around the next bend in the crooked road trail for more and around the next and the next before he understood that those he had seen were all. "There must have been a thousand of them to begin with," he muttered to himself. Again he envisioned a general staff, secure and comfortable behind desks, ordering the battalion in and he cursed. Back at quarters at evening chow he took only a little canned willy into his mess kit and one slice of bread. Silent in a corner he chewed each bite to a pap and still could only swallow it washed down with a mouthful of bitter coffee. Over and over the little line of men passed before him until his head ached and his hands grew trembly. Try as he would Shannon could not steady them. He took six of Powell's aspirins that night before he got to sleep.

In the midst of conflicting reports on local successes and failures, the last hours on the static battle line ended. The base of the wedge had been widened. At dusk from the rear came long columns of shaven, rested troops moving into the salient under darkness; and the offensive reopened along the whole twenty-four mile front. This time it was to be relentless.

To Shannon, already hollow-eyed with lids which twitched when he found rest time to close them, incidents of the battle in its resumption no longer seemed real. When he slept he dreamed, and on duty he moved in a nightmare. He no longer tried to make acquaintances among replacement personnel to his post because the faces changed too rapidly. They soon operated entirely in singles from shortage of runners. Yet he carried out assignments efficiently for his colonel; and except for Colonel Heyworth, Shannon felt terribly alone.

By whole sectors of front each day's attack commenced at dawn and continued until it dwindled into jostling thrusts of units as small as companies as the line bent and sheared into forward moving fragments. Somehow through rain and darkness it was always reinforced and reorganized and the guns dragged ahead again, now by swearing crews with ropes. At creeks in intervals between fording of guns artillerymen stood waist

deep in the water and passed shells across from hand to hand. Gray light in the east again and a half hour of shells that howled over from behind without reply from hidden enemy batteries until the barrage began to roll. Then the crash of counter bombardment down upon front lines where officers crouched, checking off last seconds on wrist watches while glancing fragments yowled over their heads. Officers who sprang out and up, and waved wide-spread arms. Steel helmets that rose in long rows behind them and became men walking hunched over bayoneted rifles. They yelled as they went, their voices lost. Some dropped and lay still. Others sank and clawed the dirt, screaming and kicking in agony of extinction.

Sometimes the artillery tone altered to a dull thunking of gas shells. Clouds spread and crept. Men emerged out of soft fog settling into declivities, unhuman creatures from another planet in their ugly masks. They tramped the brush as jungle for the things that were killing them. One clutched his throat and collapsed in convulsions of coughing and strangling.

Shannon noted and reported few regular trenches. The troops fought from gully to gully, from shell hole to shell hole over terrain which had already changed hands several times. They passed broken tanks with black crosses and without crosses, smashed wagons and gun carts and corpses. Near dusk he saw a short section of his immediate line advance too fast and bend forward into a U, its rear flanks hot with machine gun and minenwerfer fire. The flanks crowded in from left and right but were still pounded. Then the center fell back upon them, and a confused concentration of men were pounded from both sides until they scattered and ran back out of range. The officers conferred. Night was near. They would dig in where they were, they said, and told him to send more reinforcements.

Next morning Shannon was late overtaking the line, and when he caught up with it, battered soldiers and fresh soldiers intermingled were stalled before a hill. This time their flanks had gotten ahead too far and were catching hell from the top. The men checked their bayonets. A company captain led the charge, automatic riflemen on either side abreast of him with Chauchats slung low. A machine gun hidden half way up the slope spluttered almost in their faces, and men fell like tenpins. The charge broke and fled back into the holes they had left below. A tank was summoned. It lumbered straight for the nest and squashed it.

Later the tank was abandoned out of fuel. Night came on again with shells from more hills ahead. The infantry dropped back, straightened the line and began digging in. While Shannon waited for dusk to return

and report, an airplane came low out of the northern horizon. It swept over at top speed, forced from altitude by two ships with black crosses, following in a slow, long dive. Almost out of sight behind the lines they shot it down. Then five Allied machines came roaring out of the southwest, cutting obliquely across the path of the Boche planes as they fled for home. The five overtook the two high above Shannon, and as he watched the dog fight he thought for the first time at the front of Bob fighting too. It was a fresh thought, startling with the possibility that his brother was up there. The aerial battle was over in moments. One of the German planes fell slowly, twisting over and over in a kind of tortured gyration, trailing smoke. The other plummeted and crashed into a hillside with a flash like a shell burst but with flames which lasted.

Shannon glanced about at the infantrymen. They had not looked up from picks and shovels, and that seemed right. What were three or four men and an airplane or two? The 77's were still on the hilltop facing them above the burning plane, and more hills beyond there seemed to be without number. In darkness liaison would be re-established, reinforcements arrive and word passed again: "we attack at dawn."

That night at the intelligence post when Shannon lay on his bunk his cheeks as well as eyelids began twitching as he tried to relax, but in spite of them he sank almost at once into a fit of half-conscious stupor which exhausted body compelled. He awakened into cold, nameless terror by a screaming and thrashing of the man in the next bunk. Shannon leaped from his own and shook the soldier out of his nightmare, then went out into the kitchen to drink coffee and smoke again. There the tic returned to his cheeks and could not be subdued. From that night he performed his duties not in a state of physical fear even under fire, but of drugged horror.

The next day and the next attacking continued. The last tanks got shot to pieces, and the infantry had to go it without any. The wounded swamped the ambulance system. Field hospitals and dressing stations overflowed, and still men lay and died because they were not found for medical treatment.

Interspersed with German dead the 1st continued to find putrefying bodies in khaki that were held together only by cloth of uniforms, men of the 35th Division who had followed their orders of no turning back. The enemy had allowed them to penetrate as disorganized units and then annihilated them.

"They didn't know when to quit," Shannon heard a major murmur. That was during an interval when he encountered a burial detail on his

way back to Heyworth's post. The speaker, a chaplain, stood with folded arms beside a rick of maggot-ridden corpses, corded like sacks four deep. Shannon's feet had halted at the sight, and as he gazed a thankful thought came to him, remote and strange, that his nostrils had ceased to register stench. The chaplain looked at his squad of men who were digging and liming a long trench and then at Shannon and touched with his toe the Sam Browne belt on one of the bodies which an officer had worn into action along with other trappings of rank. "He didn't even know enough to take off his own bars. Poor brave fools!"

Shannon stared at him, feeling he had heard but not understood. The words set up a strange ringing in his ears as he moved on. Yards past and still looking back in hypnotic fascination he heard another voice, Anthony Powell's, saying: "I'm overdue." Shannon looked quickly front and then on both sides but he was alone. "It's the law of averages and how many times you're exposed," the voice went on distinctly before Shannon realized it was his own speaking to himself aloud.

From that day to the end of his participation in the battle, Shannon carried on without sense of time. There came a dawn (he never knew after how many) when the enemy had unexpectedly withdrawn. The infantry advanced unopposed for a mile and then before St. Georges found itself abruptly blasted to a standstill. They had hit the eastern wing of the extensive defense system which Bob Garwood had photographed not many days before. Scouts reconnoitered and brought back word of real entrenchments and big dugouts. All available artillery was called for, and for two hours prior to the infantry's attack next morning batteries bombarded it, but the remaining field guns were too few and too light for the concrete cellars. Wave after wave of troops broke against the defenses. Late in the afternoon they gained a foothold and were thrown out again in a counterattack, while a German bombardment came down behind them to prevent reinforcement.

Shannon was at the front all that day. In the evening, after the shelling had died down, he started for the rear to report. The rapid advance of the previous day had provided a belt of terrain with which he had not had time to become very familiar, and it had undergone a bewildering change as German artillery reduced landmarks. By the end of an hour and a half he knew he had gone too far for Heyworth's outpost. He turned back at an angle until he was sure he must have passed it again and then once more started rearward, still without encountering the usual echeloned reserves. The longer he walked in the gray darkness the more confused he became, and the stronger became a sense of elements strange

to the usual atmosphere. The feeling came to conscious focus with sound of horse hoofs in the mud, for he had not seen a team or rider for days. He dropped flat and waited until he heard American voices and then hailed the group. There were a dozen men and officers all on horseback, and they held guns on him while he advanced for identification. None of them knew anything about intelligence for the sixteenth infantry, they said. They were of the 42nd Division going forward to survey for relief of the 1st. "The old man's already up ahead," the first lieutenant in charge told Shannon. "You can come along and report to him, and he can tell you where your outfit is."

Shannon climbed up and rode behind one of the enlisted men to a French combination house and barn with part of the walls and all of the lean-to pigshed blown away. In the cellar beneath was a staff commanded by a brigadier general with a tiny, shiny black mustache. All were strangers. Shannon stood at attention while he reported as did all the others, and the general heard him through.

"Nothing written?" he asked.

"No, sir. There was danger of capture."

"You are sure you were instructed to say that the men could not hold through tomorrow against attack?"

"Yes, sir. Not unless they are reinforced."

"And that the enemy defenses have been found impenetrable?"

"Yes, sir. They can't break through, sir."

"Can't break through." The general chewed his mustached lip. "Can't hell! No defense is impenetrable!" He turned to his major aide. "Send back recommendation for heavy attack concentration to the area."

"Without confirming the rumors of going on the defensive until spring?" the major asked.

"Hell yes, before they *can be* confirmed. I'm not going to live in this mudhole all winter! Our best defense is continuous offense." He looked again at Shannon. "Where is it your fellows have bogged down?"

Shannon told him civilly. Inwardly he was asking: "Who is this well-fed son-of-a-bitch?" He was hot with anger for the first time in days.

"All right," said the general. "We'll use a regiment if we have to. We'll show those damned Heinies!" He motioned an orderly toward Shannon. "Give this man a cot. We'll have use for him when we move the reinforcements up tomorrow."

The orderly, a slender fellow with melancholy, effeminate features, led Shannon into a tunnel wing of the cellar, where a single candle was burning. "You sure look like you could do with some sleep," he said.

Shannon did not answer him. The orderly left and he unwrapped his

puttees and removed his shoes from his swollen feet. He took out Powell's aspirin bottle, emptied the seven remaining tablets into his palm and swallowed them in a handful. Then he lay down.

Shannon's muscles, numb with weariness, at once went lax. He blanked out his mind, a trick learned from Heyworth's veteran scouts who seized every chance to rest. As Shannon sank deep into welcomed stupor a light spot appeared in the darkness before his closed eyes. It became fixed and assumed dimensions of a window, the bedroom window of his boyhood with light of morning beyond. It fell upon Janis sleeping beside him under one of Maggie's bright patchwork quilts. Early sunlight poured over her face and disarranged hair as he had seen it one Sunday morning in their Junction City room. Her lips were a little parted and her fingers entwined about his hand held pressed against her throat. He gazed at her not daring to move for fear of awakening her and then beyond in gladness into the sunlight. The scene outside was not the home plains but the flint hills glen in which he and Janis had first surrendered to their love. They descended into it, he with his arm about her, but at the bottom it became a different glen. The winding brook was a crooked trench and the elbow nook of bluegrass a widened mud flat with a long rick of bodies. Beside them stood the brigadier with the mustache calling him to attention. Shannon looked wildly about, but the character of the flint hills had changed into a landscape of endless hills and ridges tangle-covered with tall grass and bushes and shell-torn trees. He released Janis's waist and stood stiff saluting the general. Then he marched forward obedient to orders, and the brigadier general pointed to the corpses, commanding him to lie down. Behind him he heard Janis scream.

Shannon sat bolt upright in his bunk and saw the earthen cellar walls. On his forehead great blobs of sweat broke and ran over his face and neck. His whole body shook in wave upon wave of ague. Shannon moved his back to the wall, bracing it there, stiffening legs and clinching jaws against the spasms. He managed to get one of his remaining tailormades out and lighted, inhaled the smoke in great drafts. When the violence of the seizure had subsided he stretched out again. His head was roaring, and this time he could neither relax his body nor close his mind. Through it stormed haunting visions of the front. It would be tomorrow before that detestable brigadier's orders were carried out, and reinforcements should have been rushed up at once. Suppose the enemy attacked at dawn against that weary handful of men he had left. They couldn't fall back to the reserve line, because there was no reserve line. Those echeloned behind had been used up. Tomorrow these new troops would help, but

until tomorrow. Colonel Heyworth would have acted tonight. Thoughts came to Shannon of the relatively clean, quiet quarters and the rest which should have been his, evacuating next day with Heyworth's staff. These new officers weren't of his outfit. What right did they have to hold him with them? At length Shannon sat up. Belief had mastered him that he would not now be sent back with those relieved if they survived the night. Veteran runners were too much in demand.

A glance at his wrist-watch showed Shannon it was after midnight. He was going to the rear whether or no and report to Colonel Heyworth. Something must be done before morning. That decision made, Shannon felt at once alert. As he wound his leggings his fingers ceased to tremble. He did not feel tired, insensate physically instead but with an emotional revulsion still for those shaven, cleanly uniformed officers to whom he had reported. He had to pass the open doorway to the main room where they were still conferring. He buttoned his coat and listened to their voices until sure they were absorbed. Then he slipped along the passageway by them and up the cellar steps.

Outside, Shannon struck out at once for the rear. The farther he went the keener his senses became, and the more he felt the night astir with troops in mass movement. It was not so much the actual numbers he saw and brushed against as he walked which brought the concept, for they were a mere handful by comparison. It was not the exchanged utterances of officers about unit orders, for those were usually unintelligible to the private soldier. It was joint coalition of these many little items not natural to regular course of things which charged the atmosphere with intangible expression. The men were shaven soldiers again under full pack, their uniforms clean. Automatic rifle men of the squads carried Browning machine rifles identifiable by neat, square magazines, the first Shannon had seen overseas. The artillery was everywhere notably quiet, the batteries being occupied with the task of getting forward.

Shannon knew it would be difficult to find his outfit, but find it he would. He made up his mind to ask the colonel to be returned to the 89th, and felt that Heyworth would recommend it for him. Thought of the quiet Moselle sector the 89th had occupied made him hasten his strides. Chet would be there with the old company. Thinking of Chet's companionship again, Shannon felt hungrily lonely. It did not occur to him that the 89th might have finished its rest interval after St. Mihiel. In fact it had already been moved into first reserve position, soon to be thrown into the Argonne fray.

Slushing tramp of feet around Shannon went on without abatement. Revealed at fitful intervals in the moon's dim light as it sailed across cloud

rifts, the columns of shadowy figures streamed along swallowed from sight in both directions. Rough jests and glow of cigarettes preserved earthly flavor for the scene. Tramp, tramp, tramp. With them these men took the order of the day and for succeeding days—desperate, bloody days for friend and foe alike. Armies of millions, the gray light of succeeding mornings: “We attack at dawn! We attack at dawn!”

Part IX Rehabilitation

Chapter 66

Retreating autumn gave way to cold nights and blue-hazed afternoons in Kansas, and to sharp daybreaks with frost white upon fields and roofs of farm buildings. Ice films over stock tanks had to be broken for cattle bawling to drink. Wagons rattled out to cornfields while dawn stars shone, the horses tossing their heads against restraining bits. The drivers with knees sagging against the jolts leaned backward into the lines knotted about their bodies and beat stinging, mittened hands. The brittle stalks rustled and snapped under running-gears, and across still air rhythmical thumping of ears against bangboards carried half a mile.

Waterfowl appeared by thousands migrating southward, but few people took time to hunt them. Shotgun shells were scarce and costly. Besides, the price of corn was too high and shortage of farm hands too acute to risk loss of bushels through waste of harvesting days. Early snows could bury the crop. So the ducks dallied about pasture waterholes, and along the river where Hal Barker shucked daily, great flocks rushed up and down stream on roaring wings through morning vapors—unmolested by the two persons who had been their chief annihilators there, Shannon and Chet Freeman.

To Phil, farming again because there was no one to rent his homestead acres, the work was harder than ever after his interval of retirement, and his body ached at the end of each day as it had never ached in his youth. It was not altogether physical pain. The harder he drove himself in labor, the stronger he felt an atmosphere of desolation and stalemate upon the countryside stripped of the energy of its maturing youth; and it brought for the first time to Phil doubts as to the worth of the dollars piling up in his bank account from high war prices.

In Maggie also there was a constant, terrible ache not muscular but of loneliness and fear for her sons in France. Shannon was out of the

army hospital. He had written he was well and then that he had been at the front, and in his last letter he had finally rejoined Chet and his old Kansas outfit. To Maggie his recovery from illness had only placed him in greater dangers on the battlefield.

Then into the widespread rural industry there came unexpectedly a prolonged holiday. It began in the middle of night as a telephone line-call. Maggie, restless from worry and only half sleeping, awoke to the bell's first jangle. She lay in the chill darkness and listened to the persistent clangor with waves of fear turning her body cold. It meant big news, and in panic she began shaking Phil. He aroused heavy-lidded and stiff, then sprang out of bed. The ringing ceased, and in his hurry to get to the phone he collided with a chair and swore. When Phil got the receiver to his ear, the operator was announcing through a hubbub: "As just informed by Western Union an armistice is signed."

For an instant Phil's conscious mind would not seem to function for him, but he felt his head turn toward the bedroom and heard his voice cry out to Maggie: "Mom, mom, the war is over!" A long, indrawn gasp from her came with a creaking of bed springs and rustle of her feet on the floor followed by a thump. He knew intuitively she had dropped on her knees when he heard her say: "Thank you, dear God. Thank you." There was sound of sobbing muffled into the pillow; and still through his head beat the whisper of the calm-voiced operator repeating over and over: "As just informed by Western Union an armistice is signed." Then Phil felt the receiver in his grasp and its pressure against his ear, and he returned it to its hook. He became aware of distant booming of anvils. He looked through the window toward Plainsboro and stepped out upon the porch. The sky over town was streaked with rockets. Bells were ringing, whistles blowing. The rural countryside also was aroused and dogs barking everywhere. Farmers were out in their yards with family shotguns and whatever shells could be ransacked from shelves. Little flashes leaped out of the darkness which hid Jeremy Hendricks' homestead, and from there shots echoed loudest upon the night air.

Jeremy knows Emery won't go farther than Funston now, thought Phil. His bare feet began to ache on the cold concrete, and he returned quickly inside shivering. Upstairs Phillip was out of bed yelling to know what had happened.

The chill had crept through Phil's long drawers and up his legs. He hurried to the kitchen for socks and shoes left beside the stove and to build a fire. There was no use trying to go to sleep again for a while with Maggie upset and the kid awake besides.

When Phillip scampered into the kitchen barefoot across the cold lino-

leum, Maggie was filling the coffee pot. She stopped after she had measured in the water and wiped her eyes with her apron.

Phillip stared at her because her face was tear stained and at the same time more radiantly glad than he had ever seen it. He looked from her to his father sitting at the hearth with the instinctive feeling which always came to him in moments of puzzlement that this man could answer all questions though he seldom answered any.

As usual Phil said nothing. He glanced once at Maggie and began to fill his pipe. Phillip pulled on his socks, went to the window, rubbed a patch of frost from the pane with his sleeve to see the fireworks over Plainsboro. The room was cold so far from the stove. After standing a moment he got a chair and sat with feet curled under him watching the display—excited yet inside a bit cranky with disappointment at his parents who stayed near the stove.

"How long till the boys will be back?" he heard Maggie ask.

"You better not look for them yet a while," Phil told her. Moments later he said even more matter-of-factly: "I'll have Clarence and Hal help me haul off my wheat quick. The price will be dropping."

The coffee pot began to steam and boil. Maggie got cups and a glass which she filled with milk for Phillip from a pan she had warmed on the back lid of the stove. "It will help you get sleepy again," she said. Phillip drank it slowly while his parents sipped.

The last countryside shotgun shots ceased as farmers ran out of shells, and the booming of anvils from town also died down.

Phil set aside pipe and coffee cup. "Time to go back to bed."

When his father banked the fire Phillip, wide awake, got off his chair and slowly and unwillingly went back up stairs. Deep within he felt that he and his parents were missing something tremendous, and the feeling filled him with alertness. Snuggled once more underneath quilts he reached out and pushed up the frosted window and despite the cold air which poured in upon his face kept watch for rockets which still rose from time to time above Plainsboro. He knew something big had ended and life was going to be different. Something called war had been going on, and his recollection was confused as to the precise time America and his brothers had entered into it. But now Shannon was coming home to play with him. Maybe tomorrow he would come, him and Bob both in Bob's airplane! Phillip curled to a great wave of anticipation. He did not relax until the rockets had all ceased over town. Then he dropped to sleep again with his breath smoking, making an accumulation of white frost on the quilt drawn underneath his nose. And outside, high above the glare

of town street lights on the horizon, the stars snapped and sparkled more wonderfully than fireworks have ever done.

More telephone line-calls early after daylight announced the dismissal of schools for a victory jubilee in Plainsboro, with a contingent of troops coming up from Funston to give a battle demonstration.

Maggie told Phillip about it at breakfast. "We're all going," she said. "There'll be a tank and an airplane."

Phillip's eyes popped wide and round. He dropped his spoon, splashing milky oatmeal upon the oilcloth. "Like Bob flies!" he shouted.

"I guess so," Phil said. "That'll be something for us all to see."

Phil hurried the chores and hitched up to the carriage while Maggie washed the dishes. "The grocery stores are always open," he said, when he came in. "We'll take the butter and eggs and save ourselves a trip later."

Phillip was waiting near the door, dressed in clean, blue overalls and shirt, coat and cap—ready to go.

The sun had melted all of the white frost when they drove out of the yard, leaving meadows and autumn sprung fields of winter wheat as clean and wet as if freshened by a spring shower. At the corner where the country schoolhouse stood Phil took his pipe from his mouth. "It's a waste of taxpayers' money calling a holiday," he declared. Yet once he had turned onto the county road he put the horses into a lively trot. From between his parents Phillip looked back at the silent building, joyful in his escape from its prison walls. The farther they went, the more he hitched and squirmed in the leather seat in eagerness to arrive. He twisted rearward to watch the approach of occasional autos which overtook them, and looked longingly after them speeding away, for anvils were already booming again in Plainsboro. He wished they had a car to ride in all the time, not just when Clarence or Hal took them. He kept listening for sounds of the battle which Maggie had promised and watching high in the sky for something that could be an airplane. And when the anvils ceased as they approached the flattened and tree-shrouded edge of town, he sank back and sat still for the first time, filled with silent disappointment and fear that the celebrating was all over. His dark eyes did not brighten again until their carriage crossed upper Main Street and he saw beyond the stirring crowd that soldiers and bands were just forming to parade.

Phil drove on down an alley around roped-off sections of street to the livery stable at the rear of their grocery. They unloaded and got to the crowded sidewalk as music and cheering started up far down the street.

Phillip caught a glimpse of Wart Freeman and an older boy from school running through the rear scattering of people and knew they would find a spot from which to watch. He moved to dash after them and was stopped by Maggie. "I want to go with the other kids, Mom."

"You'll get lost."

"No I won't. I want to see."

Phil took his shoulder firmly, and as had been happening often of late the man's and the boy's eyes met full. "You're old enough to mind," Phil said, and Phillip moved over to his father's side.

As the band came nearer, Phillip heard through the music a rumbling and clanking, and Phil hoisted him onto his shoulder so that he could look over the heads of people. The first thing he saw was a gray iron monster with two swinging gunbarrels pointed so directly at him that he involuntarily shrank. Then he saw Principal Harrigan and Mayor Thompson riding on top, waving flags, and Phillip stretched up high again. Rolls of confetti streamers were shooting out of upstairs windows through showers of paper scraps, both falling over everything. Through it the tank machine ground slowly past, surrounded in a thin, blue cloud of exhaust gases, and after it came the army band with horns and ornaments glittering. Phillip began to teeter up and down on his father's shoulders until he felt a tug on his feet. "Sit still," Phil told him.

The band passed and after it came waves of marching soldiers. Phillip looked half expectantly for Shannon among them until the last were gone. Following the troops was an operating manure spreader dragging an effigy of the Kaiser behind. Around Phillip as the manure spreader came abreast, cheering rose to a roar mixed with a chant:

*One two three four five six seven,
All good people go to heaven;
When they get there they will yell
Kaiser Bill has gone to hell! Hurrah—Hurrah!*

Everyone seemed to be repeating it except Phil. Phillip looked down and saw him watching with a curled half smile and shaking his head. The high swell of cheers and chanting flowed along the crowd on up the street as the spreader passed.

Next in parade was the Home Guard Band playing "Where Do We Go from Here" with units of the Home Guard marching in ragged cadence. After them came floats and wagons carrying people who lofted flags and banners or flourished red-painted bayonets, and as they were passing a sound like the roar of a high-speed auto came out of the sky. Phillip looked up and clutched convulsively at his father's head with both hands, crushing

Phil's hat down on his ears. The airplane dived upon them and swept along Main Street only a few hundred feet high. Buildings shook in its wake, and behind the rush of its passage there was a startled hush, some gasps, and then the wildest shouting of all.

"Was that Bob? Was that Bob!" Phillip yelled down at his father.

"No, no," Phil said. "For God's sake sit still up there, or I'll put you down!" He shook free an arm which Maggie had clutched with both hands and straightened his hat.

Phillip kept watching and watching over the buildings, but the airplane did not come back. After the last floats had gone by, Phil slid him down to the sidewalk. They all three backed up and stood against the wall of a building until the crowd had scattered a little; and at sight of every passing uniform, Phillip wanted to shout that Shan and Bob were soldiers.

"The restaurants will be packed," Phil said to Maggie. "We'd better buy a lunch in the grocery store and eat in the park if we want to get out to the battlefield in time."

Maggie drew a long breath that quivered. Her face still looked tight and blanched from fright at the airplane, and her hands shook a little. "I'll sit in the store while you two go," she said. "I don't want to see shooting and killing."

"It's only pretending," Phil said.

"I don't care. I don't want to see it. I keep thinking of folks who have had boys killed."

When Phillip and Phil arrived at the site of battle demonstration north of town, a 75 mm. gun, some one-pounders and several machine guns were being put into position along a hillside, muzzles pointing across a steep, wide ravine. A noisy army truck left with a load of targets—ferocious, life-sized Boches painted on heavy cardboard. They were set up like a line of attacking troops along the crest of meadow hills a quarter mile away, while infantry in battle gear marched in to occupy the ditch in the intervening ravine.

The crowd grew and grew. Phillip had never seen so many people even at the circus. They covered the whole slope behind the row of guns and more were still coming. Late arrivals collecting at the rear pressed upon those in front until military guard lines were doubled to keep them from swamping the emplacements.

Phil took Phillip's hand and moved back out of the jam up to the crest of the hillside. "We can see well enough from here," he said. "If anything went wrong like a cannon blew up or something, you'd get tramped to death down there."

They waited another half hour and Phillip watched the soldier crews with excited wonder that they could sit so unconcerned behind their big guns and smoke cigarettes, talking and joking with spectators. His legs ached from standing. He shifted weight back and forth from foot to foot but would not sit for fear of missing something. At last a whistle blew long and shrill, and the piercing sound crinkled up Phillip's back-bone. The gunners tightened helmet straps and sprang into position behind their guns. The crowd rocked and swayed. From the center of the line an officer shouted the order: "Commence firing." Phillip felt his father's grip on his hand tighten and heard him say: "Watch the big cannon!" The 75 bounced and the earth jarred, and a blast hit flat and blank into both Phillip's ears. He jumped and pressed close to Phil. An instant later there was a flash in the air above the targets. The report from the shell-burst came back to them while a thin puff of smoke from the explosion was still drifting away. The clatter of machine guns began, mixed with sharp, whining pops of one-pounders.

Phillip's ears started to ring. He saw the 75 being loaded again and crowded tight against his father's leg as it was fired. Phil looked down and placed his hands on his shoulders. "It's all right," he shouted. "Watch close over the top of a little one and you can see its shell go and where it lands."

Phillip stretched up and looked hard. The one-pounder popped, and he followed the arc of a dot which sped away from it. He saw a puff of dust leap from the meadow hillside on top a target and the target fall. "They hit him, they hit him!" he cried.

The airplane came over high and began to circle above the battlefield, dropping things that made balls of smoke where they landed. The guns fired faster and faster. Through their noise Phillip heard whistles again from the ravine. Khaki brown soldiers poured out of the ditch at the bottom. There were dozens and dozens of them. They ran forward a few yards and threw themselves down in the grass. The crackling of their rifles came clear through the bombardment. Phillip looked up at Phil. "Is this how it is where Shannon and Bob are?"

"This is the way it was," Phil told him. "Except that the other fellows would be shooting back at us."

Phillip stood straighter than ever in spite of shivers up his back at the last words and the scared feeling they brought to his insides. His fears lasted for but a moment, until he remembered that with Bob and Shannon on his side he was safe. Then wonderful possibilities opened to him for playing at war as he had against the Huns in the wheatfield. Later he had called them Germans, but always before his foes had remained too

shadowy as people for him to know exactly how to fight. The exciting new prospects with Boches now warmed him clear into his cheeks.

In a scattered, crooked line the attacking infantry moved slowly up the long slope before him. By one's and two's the men leaped to their feet, dashed a few yards in zigzag gallops, and dropped to fire new clips. The tank passed through them and began weaving back and forth in front.

Phillip tried to watch everything, but most often he looked at the airplane. When it swung out wide at last and dived upon a stretch of targets, machine guns mowing them down, he leaped and shouted: "Shoot 'em, Bob! Shoot 'em all!" He yelled so loud that he saw people notice and laugh at him. Phillip did not care. It was just the way Bob would have done it. He waited for the plane to come back again and dive, but instead it circled high.

When the infantry had advanced up most of the slope, bombardment ceased. In the silence from those nearby guns the ringing in Phillip's ears seemed louder than before. Through that ringing he heard a great, crackling surge of rifle shots. On the hillside whistles blew faint but clear, and hundreds of soldiers rose out of the tall bluestem all at once. In front of them the tank roared off, straight ahead. After it the troops charged yelling and screaming, running bent over bayoneted rifles. The yells rose to a peak of fury as the soldiers closed on the targets which remained standing and slashed them to pieces. There came a final great, great shout of victory floating back. All about Phillip hats and caps flew into the air as the crowd returned the cheer, and Phillip yelled his loudest though he could hardly hear his own voice. Only Phil remained silent. High above the whole scene the airplane went into a dizzy series of loops and rolls, and Phillip watched it with his mouth wide open as cheering died.

Evening was nearing when Phil and Phillip had hiked back to town, and the Home Guard Band was ready to play in the courthouse square. The street alongside was still roped clear of vehicles, and the pavement being spread with corn meal for a street dance. The waiting crowd was enjoying a unique aerial combat.

From roof top to roof top above the bandstand electricians had strung a network of cables for the drygoods store's Lampson carrier system. In place of baskets a man at one end had attached two cardboard airplanes to the pulleys. The forward plane was marked with black crosses and its pursuer striped red, white and blue with Bob Garwood painted bold and black upon the fuselage.

Phil stopped and stared. Phillip looked up to ask him what was going to happen and saw his father's lips part under his mustache. His black eyes had become bright. Phillip looked back at the man on the roof top

across the street, saw him squirt something upon a wad of cotton and stuff it into the German plane. Both airships were launched, and they rushed down and up and around through the network of cables. Bob's plane gave off bursts of sputters and sparkles and stuck close behind its enemy. Near the end of the run there was a blue flash from the German plane. For a moment it trailed smoke, then flamed up and fell burning from the cable. A voice from the crowd yelled: "Yea, Garwood!" By-standers whom Phillip did not know jostled and slapped Phil on the back. Everybody began to cheer and the band also struck up.

Phillip clapped his hands. "Hurrah for Bob!" He looked up again at his father and for a moment thought that this time he was going to shout too. Then his lips closed under the mustache and a faint smile curled them. He touched Phillip's shoulder. "Let's go," he said.

Phillip hung back to gaze at Bob's airplane which had returned to its roof top starting point. "They're going to do it again, Dad."

Phil looked down at him and hesitated. "Oh, all right. Watch while I get the team ready for home. But mind now, you be at McGrath's grocery in twenty minutes."

Phillip got to watch only one more dog fight. As the third was being prepared Phil returned, walking fast, and nameless fear chilled the boy the instant he saw him approaching. His father's face was a strange marble white across cheek bones, and the line of his lips was as gray as the bar of his mustache. He held a yellow envelope in one hand. He was looking at the roof top, and caught Phillip by an arm as he passed and pushed on through the crowd. He dragged Phillip with him to and onto the bandstand and thrust the uniformed band leader aside. The music stopped upon scattered, discordant notes from "Tipperary" as the players lowered instruments and half rose in their seats.

Phil threw up his hand, pointed at the electrician on the roof and Bob's plane which was about to be launched again. "Quit with that thing! Do the killings mean nothing?"

Below Phillip for a moment the spread of upturned faces was motionless, and then from here and there the crowd stirred. A voice said: "Boo-oo-ooo." Hisses arose and someone called: "Throw him off."

Phil's upraised arm stiffened and his pointing hand turned into a fist. "Stop it, god damn you—all of you! My other boy, Shannon, has been killed over there!"

Immediately there was a hush again. Phillip stared up at his father, not able to comprehend the words, yet with a fluttery, empty feeling at once astir inside him. While he looked at his father Phil's mouth slackened and twitched, and he lowered his arm and reached for Phillip's hand. They descended from the platform together, and the silent crowd opened

a pathway for them to the curb and on down the sidewalk as Phil turned toward McGrath's grocery. They got the team at the livery stable and drove to the rear entrance of the store. There Phil handed the lines to Phillip. "Hold the horses," he said tersely. He stepped down and Phillip watched him stalk toward the doorway. He still held the yellow envelope. Presently from inside came an outcry which rose like a wail. When his parents came out, his father was leading Maggie firmly though tenderly by the arm. Her feet were dragging each step and her head was hanging bent forward with tears running down her cheeks. A clerk followed in silence, carrying the egg case packed high with groceries. Beside the carriage Maggie slumped, caught hold onto Phil's shoulder, and began to shake with sobs. The clerk hesitated, looked at them furtively, and hoisted the case into the back seat space. Then John McGrath came out quickly with some other men and helped put Maggie up into the carriage seat. The group about them grew to a dozen while Phil climbed in and tucked the quilts around her against the chill which had come with approach of sundown, but no one spoke a word.

Phillip sat on the outside now instead of between the two as they drove off. The boy's last impression of Main Street as they crossed it was the one which remained with him through the rest of his life. Lights had been turned on, and the scene was of jostling hundreds about to begin a street dance and a band of uniforms and glittering horns. In the west a thick cloud bank was rising, spreading upward above roofs and bare tree tops and hurrying darkness. Along its rim it was red as fire.

Past outskirts of town and starting on the long, dusty road home he heard opening strains of the "Star-Spangled Banner" rise and the conclusion fade. After a moment's silence the band came on again full blast with "Pack Up Your Troubles" played fast like ragtime. Still later in looking back across distance he saw rockets shooting up and bursting.

Phil drove, never turning to look and without ever a word. He controlled his team sternly with one hand, his other arm about Maggie's shoulders, his head held stubbornly erect. Maggie's head was bowed, and she kept her face covered in her hands, stifling violent sobs.

The boy had never before seen lines so stony as those set into his father's profile. For Phil was not seeing death, but for the first time the threads of personal lives, his own and his dead son's, in the patterns of tragedy they made cutting into relief across the mighty pageant of a great nation at peace and at war. All important, those threads to the individual; trivial, to the world. Yet his human's soul revolted with all its strength against the truth of individual insignificance.

Phillip could only sense with strange chills what the mature mind was comprehending, not clearly but as subconscious boyhood impressions to

be borne later into clear recognition without the bitterness swollen in his father's heart. He had heard Phil shout to the crowd that Shannon was dead, but it was impossible yet for him to conceive that of Shan always so strong and gentle. To Phillip the war had been only a spectacle—band music and flags—Bob an aviator hero—school dismissed at three o'clock by war saving time—loads of pocket money from skunk and possum pelts—ice cream parties in unheard-of numbers for young men going away somewhere a little while so they could come home in uniforms on furloughs to more parties. Once a day at home they ate Hoover's cornbread; and the boy dearly loved johnny-cake, brought to the table hot and golden brown and eaten with great gobs of yellow butter.

Maggie's sobs after a while became long, low, and quivering. She raised her head, and Phillip heard her breath catch and momentarily cease as she gazed at Phil. Impulsively she turned to him, clutching with both her hands his own still on her shoulder and pressing it to her cheek. "Forgive me, father. Forgive me. I didn't think!" she cried.

Phil looked at her dumbly as though shaken dazed from sleep.

"It's worst for you. He was the most like you of any of them," Phillip heard her whisper.

Phil nodded. "And kind like you," he said, and his voice shook. "He was the best in both of us." He kissed her piteously trembling lips and strained her to him hard before facing again into the night, and still kept his arm about her as she buried her face anew into her hands.

Phillip had never seen his father kiss and embrace his mother before. In presence of their immeasurable bond of suffering and understanding from which he felt excluded, he sat shriveled at the farthest extremity of the carriage seat fearful of making a sound, yet with his widened black eyes drawn always back to his father's face to be more and more frightened—and with his heart drinking in all. Only once more on the drive home did he see Phil's stiff lips move under his mustache to shape words, and they were muttered as though spat. "Savages—fools—God damned ignorant fools!" Then Phillip's fears melted into helpless sympathy and he felt noiseless tears running down his cheeks.

Chapter 67

Andy got shore leave for Paris to see Wilson on his first visit greeted as an apostle by the populace. Before he returned in the spring to formally negotiate with heads of states the just treaties and ideals of his Fourteen Points, public ardor had cooled and officials had aligned on policies.

Nowhere was this shift in sentiment more pronounced than in the

United States, where the war had been a crusade; for while crusading fervor flames quickly, no other pitch of emotional enthusiasm is so prompt to subside as that based on an abstraction.

Andy was advised early of a change setting in by correspondence from home. After death of Shannon Phil's letters became so bitterly antagonistic toward Wilson that Andy discounted his opinions as biased by the tragedy. His brother Jim's complaints of falling farm prices and the calculated judgment of Vivian he could not dismiss. She, he knew, would weigh everything she heard and read, and she had plenty of time to read and think, waiting for him in Kansas. "Our editors and statesmen no longer see the need for American security through mutual assistance treaties," she said. "They demand to know what commitments the President intends to make in Europe."

"As soon as he gets the peace conference to going, people will see again that it *was* all worthwhile," Andy answered her. He told of his early morning bus ride from Brest along the rail route of Wilson hours later and village crowds at stations waiting to wave tribute, of peasants abandoning their fields to stand tirelessly beside the track—men, women, and children hoping to glimpse the President. Andy's emotion at the sight rose again almost to pain in picturing all those people in their quaint foreign clothes, holding American flags and stoically keeping vigil through the cold morning.

"All work had stopped in Paris with the next two days declared *fête* days for us. The street route along which Wilson would ride was so packed that even taxis couldn't move. I had given up trying to get through the crowd up to Daupin Gate when some soldiers who had rented space on a roof waved to me and I went up to them. The whole Republican Guard Band played the "Star-Spangled Banner" when the train came in. I was close enough to recognize Wilson, Clemenceau and President Poincaré, who were there to greet him, and Poincaré had to wipe his eyes after he shook hands. When they stepped back, Wilson stood alone and just looked at the crowd. They called out to him: 'Paix! Que la paix éternelle règne!' It sounded more like a big sob than anything else. Wilson couldn't speak a word until some of the people began trying to say it for him in English. Then he repeated it back to them in French to show that he understood. 'Citizens of France,' he told them, 'you shall have it—peace forever!' And then before he knew it, he had put out his arms like he could take everyone into them. 'God bless you all!' he said."

It had sustained Andy's exhilaration of confidence in his President's leadership to describe the reception, and he went on to speak as of old to Vivian of the good which would follow for generations from the world-

wide friendship of a League of Nations. He anticipated to her the pleasure they would both feel from following the negotiations step by step to wonderful fulfillment.

Andy's first real misgivings did not arise until after the initial conference meeting in mid-March when the question came up of opening the conference to newspaper men—Open covenants of peace openly arrived at. It was the first of the Fourteen Points, and was defeated with the American delegates voting unanimously in favor and outnumbered by foreign representatives voting almost solidly against. From that day on there were only censured reports and conjectures from Versailles.

Andy tried desperately to follow at least the general course of negotiations, purchasing both foreign and American newspapers. For his efforts he saw Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Orlando, and Wilson emerge as the Big Four to dominate meetings in disregard to small nations and the promises to them of freedom and representation. He saw German islands and colonies ceded to Allied powers without regard to "the interests of populations"—amidst intimations that they had long ago been apportioned by secret treaties. Germany was truly assessed to pay "to the last farthing." Reparation demands piled up into billions upon billions until Secretary Lansing was quoted by news men: "You have mortgaged the new German republican government into bankruptcy. It cannot possibly succeed."

Hints and rumors came faster and faster as weeks passed—France demands more than Alsace-Lorraine, Britain to get German fleet, Bolshevik Russia to be occupied. And through the bits of news ran the counter theme: Wilson protests violation of his sixth point. Wilson pleads for disarmament, Wilson objects, or Wilson concedes. Through it all the news from home became steadily more discouraging with reports of growing defections in party ranks reminiscent of Populist disintegration after the Spanish War. Finally there came bold, authenticated headlines: "Wilson denounces Italian claims to the Tyrol and Fiume—accuses Italy's leaders of selling their nation into war"—and a storm of European abuse broke upon Wilson.

After that Andy found little more concrete news, only pictures of Wilson in long coat with briefcase in hand still going forth to meeting after meeting. In them his face grew thinner, more tired, and gravely aged. When the *DeKalb* docked at Brest on her seventh trip after the armistice, he saw the *George Washington* fired to a full head of steam and supposed the conference to be over. For four days beside one of the quays the *DeKalb's* crew loaded coffins from the long ricks constantly replenished by army trucks. They put to sea near evening past the *Washington* yet

unmoved at anchor and black smoke still floating from her stacks. Off duty, Andy stood at the railing and looked back at the President's ship and beyond it to the coffins waiting many as ever on the wharves. Each day all day he had watched to see the President's party go aboard, and his first disappointment at leaving ahead of it now gave way to thankfulness that Wilson had not arrived and seen all those dead. It brought thought of how many more there might be and of the hold under him filled from floor plates to iron ceiling—and then it occurred to him that Shannon's could now be among them. Andy's judgment dismissed the remote likelihood at once, but it brought back some of the bewildering shock felt at receiving Phil's terse announcement of his son's death. Phil had not mentioned it again, but Vivian had later added that he had been killed in action. Andy thought of Shannon's struggle to live aboard ship, of the doctor's battle to save him, of his own fervent hoping—all of which now seemed like effort wasted. It brought him a sense of inevitabilities unalterable by human endeavor, and into a low yet relaxing state of tiredness.

A British destroyer was passing near on their right and some idle *DeKalb* sailors shouted across to crewmen lounging along the other vessel's rail. "Ahoy there, limeys. Now who won this war?"

"Yoi did, but we done the foightin'," came the laconic reply.

"What the hell did he mean by that crack?" one of the sailors asked, but to Andy the British response was typical of growing European resentment of Americans. Prices to them had doubled and tripled since that day he had watched Wilson arrive until there were riots in night clubs against overcharges.

From behind toward uptown, came faintly the strains of martial airs. Daily or nightly the French military still found occasion to celebrate victory. Andy saw again the parade of his yesterday's shore leave. Ranks of veteran Blue Devils with shoulders back and chests high, their steps a winged redundancy of the music. The uniforms were immaculate like the trimmed mustaches and flashing bayonets. But in the faces the lost, lifeless stares of puppets too broken of will to resent puppetdom. Unaccountably Andy suddenly shuddered.

The *DeKalb* had passed out of the harbor, but Andy did not look back at the shore lights. From the bright deck which still seemed strange at night after the long darkness of the U-boat era, he gazed out across the dim and gently heaving ocean and thought again of the coffins. It struck Andy now as strange that thought of burial at sea had at the time of Shannon's illness seemed so oppressive. After a while he put his hand into his pocket to Vivian's last letter but did not remove it. He did not care to read again of falling wages and profits and rising unemployment—all

blamed on the President. "Women are burning him in effigy for not staying here to fight for suffrage," Vivian had said, "and Republicans like Senator Lodge are making the most of everything." At the end she had asked again when he was coming home, and in response to that repeated question Andy had filed for his discharge. "Because of my age priority I ought to get it ahead of most of the others," he had written her. I should know something on that by the time I get back to New York, he reflected now, and that thought made him feel a little more cheerful.

However, when he arrived and went for information on the action taken on his papers it was to learn of an order from Washington to hasten troop evacuation of Europe. It placed all transport crewmen into a critical duty category and shattered Andy's hopes of early discharge.

The same evacuation order that held up early release of some navy personnel sent soldiers pouring back to the United States in a flood; and while New York was showering confetti by tons upon her many returning regiments, the 89th Division and Chet Freeman came home to Kansas for discharge.

The spring-fresh bluestem bluffs along the Kaw River were again darkened with men as they maneuvered in grand review before being mustered out. It was the same drill field where they had learned their basic rudiments of squads right and left, but it was a different 89th. When the waves rolled past the general's stand, they marched with the indolent ease of veterans, and the final roll call revealed the darker significance of intercepted German dispatches rating the division as shock material. The 353rd Regimental banner still bore the name Kansas, but the ranks had been so many times depleted and refilled that now there were men present answering to every state in the Union.

After dismissal, Chet strolled among roaming soldiers about the queerly familiar grounds and shook parting handshakes with buddies. Though a native of the state he felt as much at sea as those others about to turn their faces to various points of the compass for their last lap homeward. Strange places and expanse of distance had restricted Kansas to a mere spot on the map. Like his comrades Chet told himself he was glad to be home and through with the army, and like the others he wondered with an unanticipated loneliness of heart whether it were really true. He saw men with relatives on hand to convey them to villages and farmsteads—mothers and wives who sobbed their gratitude on uniformed breasts and then wiped their eyes, kiddies who clung to soldiers' legs and hampered movements until disengaged, babes who refused their stranger parent's arms, graying fathers who shook hands solemnly with their sons and repressed

their feelings as his own father would do later. Old John Freeman was failing fast and not able to leave his bed, but Chet knew now the meaning of the nostalgia in his veteran father's eyes when they had parted at the Plainsboro rail station two years before. With Shannon missing and with memories of Shannon strong in his mind, Chet was alone among the thousands and glad to be alone.

Chet would have liked to remain so for a while after reaching home, but there was a crowd to meet the train at Plainsboro, and a picnic welcome had been planned for all the returned soldiers the very next day. Shannon had been the neighborhood's only casualty; and though Bob and Andy had not yet been released, the rest of the boys were on hand for the church-sponsored gathering in the camp meeting grove.

It was a sunny afternoon. The long tables under the trees had been spread with white cloths when Chet arrived, and out in the open meadow children played mumbly-peg or just romped. While the women cut the cakes and pies, mixed the lemonade, and prepared huge plates of sandwiches, the men sat around cranking the ice cream freezers or gathered in little groups about the ex-soldiers.

Oscar Karns was the central figure in uniform. His face had its old time alcoholic flush, but he looked taller than ever in a brand new warrant officer's outfit with a Distinguished Service Cross.

"I went over with the first troops and never got a scratch," he proclaimed, "not even a wire cut. I'd just as soon go fight some foreign bastard anytime as stay here and plow corn! That's why I re-enlisted, and I'm going to stay in till they retire me on a pension."

Chet would have passed by, but Oscar hailed him from over the heads of his listeners, and Chet had to greet him. Oscar stuck out a hairy hand. "You don't need to salute me here," he said. He looked at Chet's shoulder patch. "The 89th got overseas a little while. Where did you operate?"

"We were in at St. Mihiel and again in the Argonne."

"The hell! We did most of our fighting there, too!"

"So I was told," Chet said, but as he looked at Karns with his heavy, dark red jowls, he was replaced by the last sight Chet had had of Shannon, a corpse with half his face blown away. He had fought for a while practically with Oscar. Why did it have to be Shannon? Chet dropped his gaze to turn away, but Karns was already talking.

"I wish you and I could have met over there. We must have been close enough. I'd have showed you a time!"

"It was a big army," Chet said. He left him and was overtaken a few steps off by Henri Loubet. Henri's black eyes were winking fast and jubilantly and they shone warm as he shook Chet's hand.

"You're the only one of the boys back I hadn't seen yet," he said. "You're all heroes for helping save France." Then Henri's gaze returned to Oscar. "He's sure changed, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Chet.

"You heard he told old Ezra where to get off?"

"No."

"Yup. Ez started giving him orders again soon as he came home. Oscar slapped the old man's face and told him where he could go! I guess it took the army to finally make a man of him."

Henri went to join the group listening to Oscar, and Chet moved on. He kept watch for Phil and Maggie. Chet did not want to meet them, but he had sent Shannon's belongings home and knew he would have to talk with them sooner or later. They arrived as people were sitting down to eat, and he joined them deliberately at the table. The tears started in Maggie's eyes as she held Chet's hand, but she forced them back and Chet sat down at her side. Phil talked about Bob. "He enlisted for three years when he went in so he could get a commission. That's the reason he isn't back yet."

"They'll probably let him out earlier anyway," Chet said. "They're turning a lot of them loose."

He ate slowly with moisture beading his forehead and upper lip, trying to watch his manners and speaking little except to answer questions. Chet had always been shy in mixed company, and now was doubly so from fear of lapsing into the vile lingo of the army before Maggie or other women. He remembered the lecture of an elderly Sister from a Knights of Columbus Post just before departure from overseas, and the kindly but plain language in which the men had been reminded of their state of degradation. "You're going home now," she had said. "You don't want your people back there—mothers, sisters and sweethearts—to see you this way."

Chet's state of mind differed from that of other veterans around him only in intensity, which was one reason home folks found them generally reticent. They would talk of the odd customs and manners of European peoples, and occasionally when in the presence of only his own sex one would open up to joke about liquor and French girls; but they shied from accounts of battlefields, the very tales their listeners wanted to hear. And of the unnatural relations encountered among men crowded into camps apart from companionship of women, the returning soldiers did not speak even to each other. But there was still another element, disillusionment in human nature, impressed so harshly that it would influence their attitudes

for the rest of their lives: By taking part in war they had been forced to recognize how uncompromisingly mean men could be.

After supper Phil and Chet rose by mutual consent and walked off to the edge of the grove. Phil's lips and mustache quivered as they stood in silence looking at the sunset. "We got a letter from his captain, but it didn't tell much more than the telegram. How did it happen?"

Chet hesitated a moment. He was uncertain of how much he should reveal. He had gathered much of Shannon's relationship with Janis Quinlan from her bundle of letters among his friend's possessions. He had returned them all to her with a note. From her one brief answer he had not been completely sure whether Phil and Maggie knew anything about her. He guessed now that they did not. Anyway, they'll have to bring that up themselves if it's ever brought up, he decided. Then he looked at Phil and said, "I wasn't there to see it. We got separated leaving Funston, and Shan was a long time in a hospital. After that he got shoved into the 1st Division for weeks of worse hell than most of us saw.

"Well, he finally did get his papers straightened out and transferred back to our old company after the army broke through in the Argonne. Only it wasn't the same company. Some of the boys were missing and others had new jobs. They put Shannon to hauling supplies as soon as they found out how good he was handling horses, and they still kept me as a dispatch runner. We only got to see each other once in a while."

"I see."

Chet took a breath. "I did talk to a driver who was with him. He got hit only two days before it was over." Chet choked on the last words. His fists clinched and cords bulged suddenly on his neck. "What makes me so God damned mad is there was no reason for it to have happened at all! We all knew it was about to end. There was no advance going where we were. Our whole sector had been quiet for a week. Then some marine fliers got sent to our airfield. A son-of-a-bitch'n leatherneck can't ever rest. They got to flying over the German lines, shooting and dropping bombs just for the hell of it, and that brought the German planes. First thing we knew both sides were catching hell from the air. Shan was with a supply train that got spotted coming up from the rear. The Germans dived on it, and one of their bombs fell on his wagon."

"I see," Phil said again. He looked away until Chet had regained composure. "Thanks for telling me and for sending his things home. I—would always have wondered."

They stood in silence until aroused by a burst of laughter from the picnic area where men were again standing about in groups. "You can laugh,

but it wasn't funny when an officer bawled you out for doing your best," they heard Emery Hendricks say.

"Why didn't you tell him it wasn't your fault?"

Emery snorted. "You didn't tell them devils *anything*. They told you!"

Chet looked at Phil and smiled faintly. They turned together and went quietly over to join the crowd.

Chapter 68

After repeated requests Andy got his discharge late in July, a month after the peace conference had ended. Enroute home to Vivian and Norma Lee he stopped in Washington to apply for his old job. The city was sweltering under a heat wave. The sun and pavement burned his feet in his black shoes, and even in navy whites his blouse became sweat-wet to his back and shoulders on the street to the State Department.

In the familiar waiting room to Bryan's old office a colonel sat cross-legged, puffing a cigar. Other chairs were empty. Andy looked toward the reception desk. The plump woman fanning herself behind it was a stranger. He gave her his name. "I used to work here. Secretary Lansing will see me."

"The Secretary is out of town."

"Then I would like to see the undersecretary."

The receptionist stopped fanning. Her gaze idled up and down Andy's uniform and rested a moment on his sleeve with seaman's rank. "Applications for employment are handled by the division of personnel," she said.

"I've written those offices three letters about reinstatement and got only polite regrets," Andy told her. "I have to see somebody that remembers me."

Across from Andy the colonel coughed and mouthed his cigar. The woman unwadded a handkerchief in her palm and wiped her forehead. "The Division of Personnel makes the undersecretary's appointments. It's in the left wing downstairs."

"I know where it is," Andy said. He was too familiar with technique of political run-around to blame the receptionist and left. A glance into the huge waiting room of the Personnel Division satisfied him. Chairs were filled and people standing. I'd wait all afternoon to fill out forms to be filed and forgotten, he thought. I'll go on home and get our state party

chairman to put the pressure on. Yet while the thought passed through his mind, he felt in himself a lack of enthusiasm.

For a while Andy strolled corridors trying to get back again into the spirit of things. He saw white-shirted lobbyists going in and out of offices in unheard-of numbers. He and Phil had called their kind human leeches in the Populist days. Andy tried to shake off doubts they brought, but experience as a politician would not let him disguise the atmosphere of corruption and decay.

Andy left with an empty feeling of discouragement. "Vivian didn't exaggerate," he muttered, "but how could it have got so bad so soon!" Then thoughts of home with Vivian and Norma and freedom from the navy warmed his spirits again.

Andy's train did not leave until eleven, and while finishing supper over a newspaper he read that Bryan was in the city conferring with Wilson. Immediately the great and joyous thought filled him that the Nebraskan was returning to the Cabinet. The Wilson and Bryan team again! It seemed the answer to everything, Muscle Shoals and development of the Tennessee Valley, Norris's dream of rural electrification—all of the great program shunted aside by the war. Within minutes he had located Bryan's hotel and been invited to his room.

Bryan stood huge and erect as ever when he opened the door, and his voice was just as full-toned. "Come in, Andrew. Come in!" They shook hands as if seeking to out-grip each other.

"I didn't know of you here until an hour ago," Andy said.

"Nor I of you in town until you called." Bryan took him by the shoulder to a chair beside a stand with two fresh cigars. Andy saw that Bryan had remembered his brand, and a treacherous warmth threatened his eyes as he picked one up, smelled it, and bit off the end.

Bryan sat and watched him smiling. "Are you back to be with the State Department?" he asked.

In his new state of well-being, Andy laughed. "That seems to depend. I got brushed off this morning, but I should have expected that. I didn't get to talk to anyone I knew."

"Your work was impeccable, and your government is obligated to take you back—if you desire it," Bryan said. "If you have to make an issue of it, I can still be of influence."

A stab of momentary uncertainty made Andy look quickly at Bryan. "Still be? Won't you be here again?"

Bryan shook his head. "I was not called to Washington for that. I was asked to organize citizen pressure for senatorial ratification of the League of Nations."

"Wonderful!" cried Andy, and then he saw that Bryan had only paused in what he had to say. At Andy's exclamation lines tightened about his eyes and pain flickered behind the brown orbs.

"I had to refuse."

Andy stared. There had never been friction between Bryan and Wilson on the principle of a League. It seemed to Andy that Bryan, looking back at him, read his disbelief. "I'd fight for his League the rest of my life if it would work, but it won't and the people here want no part of it. I had to tell him so."

Andy moistened his lips. "What did he say?"

"The President is worn out and very nervous," Bryan said gently, and Andy knew at once that they had quarreled again.

In the silence following there poured through Andy's mind all that Phil, Jim, and Vivian had written and also the political demoralization he himself had seen that afternoon. While he resisted the sagging, leaden feeling brought into his chest, Bryan sat bent forward in his chair, staring ahead as if considering whether to say more. He turned his gaze into Andy's. "You've been away and out of touch with home trends, and you had best understand this now, Andrew. The people are in revolt against our party and the President. His cause, all of it, here and abroad is lost. You should know before you choose to return to the State Department for what can be only a short time."

"Europe has taken his League," Andy said stubbornly.

"I wish to Almighty God that were truly true but it isn't. We didn't get peace without victory; we got victory. His League cannot possibly succeed under the Versailles Treaty. The most damnable aspect is that the President is the only person who can't realize it." Bryan got up and took a turn about the room, smashing one big fist again and again into the other palm; as he strode back and forth his voice began to roll as of old. "I checked with Colonel House on treaty terms before conferring with Wilson. Not one of his fourteen points was accepted! You can't occupy Russia or block her from the sea. You can't give Sudetan Germans to the Czechs and Tyrol Germans to Italy. You can't divide a nation with a corridor like Danzig. European governments are not even thinking in terms of justice and peace for the world but of advantages for future wars."

Cotton dryness came into Andy's mouth and throat. Fascinated he watched Bryan halt behind the chair he had vacated, spread out his immense hands along the back rest and grip until his fingers disappeared into the fabric. His gaze burned into Andy's. He started to speak on, stumbled and halted for a new beginning. It was the first time Andy had

ever known him to choke on words. "Do you know they laughed at his Covenant and called it *fine words*? Can you believe it, that Clemenceau shook him by the throat, spat in his face, and called him a Boche!"

Andy shook his head, swallowed, and tried to lick his lips moist.

Heat left Bryan's gaze as he searched Andy's face. "Before and through the war you thought your President would succeed. I did not, but I prayed for him at the conference."

"I—I can't understand," Andy said. "I saw him received in France, and the French people would have followed him anywhere. My God, if they knew what you have told me, they would rise and kill Clemenceau! Why didn't the President tell them?"

"He felt that he dare not," Bryan came back around his chair and sat down close before Andy. "He considered it. He even had his ship made ready to sail under threat to desert the conference with a public announcement to the world that he could not make the just and lasting peace he had promised with Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando. But at the last moment he could not go through with it. He saw what you have just mentioned: The people over there had put all the faith they had left in him alone. He feared a reaction that would throw the whole continent into bloody revolution and Bolshevism."

Instinctively, unconsciously Andy nodded immediate and vehement agreement. Before his nod Bryan halted for a motionless, reflective interval before he set his jaw and continued. "I myself wish he had taken the chance. Without lasting peace Europe is doomed and had as well crash now. He might only have overturned cabinets and ministries, and the people might have sent to him in Washington new representatives with whom he could deal. We will never know."

For moments after Bryan's voice ceased he and Andy sat silent staring past each other. Andy in his sightless gaze saw the *George Washington* at anchor with smoking stacks, and there rose through him a full comprehension of the bleak and utter loneliness of his President caught in such a decision and in the inhuman weariness of futility. Tears wet his eyes, and suddenly he wanted desperately to be away—anywhere but in this city where he felt close to Wilson.

Andy felt a hand, strong and kind, pressed down briefly upon his where it lay on the arm of his chair. "You had faith in him, Andrew, and you needed to know how hard he tried."

Andy stirred and wiped his cheeks dry under his lashes with the tips of his fingers. He did not avert his face. "Thank you," he said, and as soon after as his vision had cleared he hastened to take out his watch. He looked up full into Bryan's eyes and saw his action understood.

"I'll bet you can hardly wait to get back to your wife and daughter," Bryan said, gently smiling. "I'll call a taxi and go with you to the station. It has been good to have you here to talk to. I've felt like a volcano inside this evening."

In the cab Bryan's words were all hearty—about crops and huge harvests in Kansas and Nebraska. "The new year really starts in the fall for our farm folks, when they plow and sow their wheat."

Andy smiled faintly to himself in listening. He's telling me it's time to start over, he thought. Why not? Vivian's wish had always been to farm. Half the home place is ours, and Jim will sell us his share. Andy saw the big house, old and rambling from being built wing by wing but all of oak and standing sturdy. He slid a hand down over his waistline, still flat and firm, and out of the touch of it came the good memory of air, sun and soil, and the rhythmic feeling of muscles working warm on scoop-shovel or pitchfork handle.

When Andy bade Bryan goodbye at the train gate he did not feel ready for his berth. Alone, unbidden thoughts of Wilson sprang again to mind, and he passed through his Pullman on into the smoking car.

Chapter 69

The next day while Andy rode westward with new plans to retire from politics and to farm, Captain Robert Garwood arrived in Plainsboro with an army nurse bride and no thoughts for the future. Just as he had kept enlistment as a surprise, so again he had not written of discharge or marriage.

It was Saturday evening but still daylight when the couple left the station side by side with their overseas bags and both in uniform. "Everybody'll come to town tonight," Bob said, "and it'll be easy to get a ride out home."

Few farmers had yet arrived, and when they reached lower Main Street and looked up it with window displays still unlighted, it seemed shorter and drabber than he remembered—until he saw the familiar slanting shoulders of Clarence entering an implement store. Bob stationed his wife just outside the door. "You watch from here and listen. I'm really going to make him stutter!" Grinning widely he stepped inside.

Clarence was at the counter when Bob sidled up from behind and jostled him. Clarence moved over to make room. When Bob shoved again harder he turned his head. His mouth dropped open and for a second he stood transfixed before he whirled and caught hold of his brother's arms.

"B-b-b-bob! You cuss, you!" They both threw back their heads and laughed.

"When'd'ja get back?"

"Just off the train," Bob said. "Where's Effie and Clara?"

"They stayed home to chore. I came in early after a new drill gear. Thought I might have to drive clear to West Bend for it."

Bob could hardly wait for Clarence to get his purchase and as they emerged from the store he stepped out before him and put his arm around his wife. "Clair, this is your new sister, Joan!"

Clarence looked at her, at his brother, and back at the slim, uniformed girl with boyish bobbed golden hair and eyes as clear gray as fresh well water. She held out her hand, smiling. His mouth dropped open as at first sight of Bob and this time remained so.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with her?"

Clarence still stood before them until Bob began to laugh. Then he came to, flushed in confusion and grasped his sister-in-law's hand warmly. "I—I've never been so d-damned beat! Congratulations!"

They all three laughed together, for several seconds unable to stop.

After they caught their breaths, Clarence's eyes filled with excitement all over again. "Gosh, what'll the folks say! I'll take you home soon as I finish the trading."

Bob and Joan were waiting in front of McGrath's grocery when Clarence brought the egg case to his car and set it in the running board carry-all. Street lights came on, and farm families began filling the sidewalks.

Clarence cranked the engine, and they all three squeezed into the Ford's front seat with Joan in the middle.

Out on the open county road, Clarence spoke with concern of the surprise in store for their parents. "I'm not sure it would be the best thing to bust right in on Mom like you did on me."

"I've been wondering about that too, now that it's near," Bob said. Beside him Joan squeezed his hand. He smiled to her soberly. "I guess we've all three been thinking of it." Then he asked the question that had to be asked. "How did they take it—about Shan?"

"Mom harder than Dad, I think—but of course he doesn't let things like that show. For Mom it came on top of Grandpa and Grandma Palmer passing away close together. There'll be trouble before that estate is settled." He paused while Bob took out cigarettes, gave one to Joan and lighted them.

"You won't find the folks changed a great lot," Clarence continued. "They look tired, but they'll get rested now that there are renters again. It was pretty rough on them for Dad to go back to full time field work with all the chores left to Mom."

"Phillip ought to be big enough to do some of it," said Bob.

"Na-a, he's no help," Clarence said. "He's learned to read books, and Dad gets them from the library for him by the dozens."

"He was always crazy about the stories Shan told him," Bob said.

They rode on in silence. The horizon was lighting up yellow where the moon was to appear. When its bright orange rim showed above the flat landscape, Bob felt Joan's shoulder press his. He ground out his cigarette butt on the floorboard with his toe and held her hand again.

Presently Clarence reached forward and folded down the upper pane of the windshield, and a rush of air flowed past them, ballooning the top on the touring car. Bob sat up sharply, facing into the blast, and for an instant his gaze started to search the sky around and above him. Then he settled back. He felt a squeeze from Joan's fingers curled around his, looked at her, and smiled faintly.

"The folks go to bed early. You could stop at my place till morning," Clarence said.

"No," said Bob. "Mom would want me there tonight."

Moonlight made the dry earth gray in plowed fields slipping past, and parched straw of unturned stubble looked white. When they turned off the county highway on to the township road, a sharp, sweet pain rose and pressed higher and harder into Bob's throat. Sight of the grove and squat farmhouse and silhouette of huge barn beyond brought a burning to his eyes. "They're still up. There's a light in the kitchen."

"It's probably the kid readin'," Clarence said. At the turn-in he reached down and cut the lights and ignition switches. "I'll roll in easy and maybe he won't see us."

It was Phillip awake as Clarence had guessed, and he was in act of stepping outside before retiring. They saw him leave the porch at the same time he saw the car coasting into the yard. He came toward it, and the moonlight fell upon Bob's face and uniform. Phillip halted. He threw back his head and let loose a wild whoop.

Bob sprang from the car and seized his shoulders. "Shut up! You'll scare Mom to death."

Clarence and Joan got out, and Phillip stared at the strange woman. They all listened a moment, but the house seemed silent.

"You go in and wake them," Bob said to Clarence. He climbed the steps after him with Joan, and as they entered the kitchen Maggie emerged from the dining room and halted as if brutally struck. Her face turned deathly white. Her long nightgown began to sway, and Bob ran forward, caught her and held her up. For an instant as she sagged against him he thought she had fainted, until she pulled his face down and pressed his cheek to her cheek with both hands.

"Robert! Oh, Robert!"

Maggie kissed every part of Bob's face with tears streaming from her eyes until embarrassedly he held her away.

"Why didn't you write us you were coming?" she said.

"I wanted to get here first and have Clarence tell you, but Phillip went and yelled." He started to look around for his little brother and saw Phil also in the kitchen gazing at him with wet eyes and across from him beside the window Joan standing waiting. Bob stepped between his parents so that he could take a hand of each and turned them. "I've brought a wonderful surprise to you, your new daughter."

Chapter 70

The morning after return Bob tried on his overalls and they still fit, and Joan put on a house dress. They stood for a long moment with an arm around each other's waist and looked at their uniforms spread out on the bed before they picked them up and hung them out of sight in the closet.

Though Bob started wearing farm clothes he seemed unable to fit himself back into the field work he tried to take off Phil's shoulders; and Maggie was quick to notice. The first day out to sow wheat he forgot to refill the seed box. The next afternoon he came in for a drink because he had lost the water jug; and it was Phillip, who pointed with laughter to it hanging from a horse's hame where Bob had placed it before leaving the yard. The following week while mowing he caught his pants' cuff in a sprocket and tore a rip from the denim higher than his knee, jerking to keep his foot out of the gears.

Maggie turned white when she saw him showing the rip to Joan. "You might have lost a leg," Maggie cried.

"I might have but I didn't," Bob said.

"I'll mend it," she told him quickly, to forestall Joan.

After supper Bob bathed in the stock tank and put on fresh clothes, but instead of sitting on the steps with Phil he walked off by himself toward the pond in the meadow. From the kitchen where they were washing dishes, Maggie saw Joan watch him go and covertly studied her daughter-in-law. Maggie could not deny a tender longing in the light gray eyes; but Maggie was irritated rather than touched because of composure of understanding also in the pretty face for what Maggie herself could not understand. Bob was home now. He should be happy. Maggie felt it an affront that Joan did not confide what she seemed to know. Instead she

said goodnight quietly as soon as they finished the dishes and went to her room. When Maggie, with sewing basket and Bob's ripped overalls, sat down across the dining room table from Phillip and the reading lamp, she looked at the boy, who was completely oblivious to her presence; and a twinge of jealousy shot through her for the quick way he had taken up with Joan. It's all because of those books she reads to him and tells him about, Maggie thought. She wouldn't have time for that if she had her own house to keep. When she smelled cigarette smoke coming from under the bedroom door, Maggie stopped trying to resist her distrust and let it swell into her chest. As soon as she had finished her mending she went determinedly out to Phil, who sat smoking on the porch steps. "We've got to do something for Robert!"

"Sit down," Phil said.

Maggie obeyed but when he added nothing she burst out again. "I can't stand seeing him so unhappy."

Phil continued to stare off into evening gloom. "Do you think it's up to us? He's a grown man now."

"Well, she isn't doing anything about it!"

"What's the matter with you and Joan?"

"Nothing's the matter with me. She—she hides things from me. She's in there right now smoking again, and she slips away to do it!"

"If you hadn't looked at her the way you did when Bob gave her a cigarette that first time at breakfast, she'd never have thought anything about smoking before us," Phil said.

"If you can't see it, I can. She's the one keeping Bob from being satisfied," Maggie said. Then her voice rose in pitch on a note of fear. "I saw him take his uniform out this evening and look at it, and her right there with him. She's trying to get him to go back to flying airplanes and he'll get killed. She don't care for Bob a bit!"

Maggie saw Phil's chin stiffen in profile against the sky, and he faced around squarely. "You don't know her well enough to say that, and I don't want you to say it again."

Maggie quailed and sat hushed, and Phil took her hand and spoke gently. "I've been watching them both, Mom, and I don't think you need to get scared. Joan is from the East and the city same as I was, and Bob has been away quite a while. He knows he can farm the home place if he wants to—I've told him so and that we'd build a house for him. It's just taking them a while to get re-rooted."

For another week Bob moped about the farm, and then one evening he and Joan returned from driving Clarence's car, and Maggie saw their faces

bright with excitement as they entered the kitchen door. Bob caught her hand and took her on with them into the sitting room where Phil and Phillip sat reading. "I've rented a ranch. Two hundred acres of creek valley farm land and two sections of pasture!"

"He's going to teach me to ride horseback!" Joan said.

Phillip looked up, suddenly big-eyed. "Like the girls in Zane Grey's books!"

"Sure, and you can come live with us and be a cowboy."

Bob grinned at Maggie in her own wide-eyed surprise and then gaily at Joan. "Ahead of all that you're going to learn to milk."

"Is it far away?" Maggie asked.

"Only across the line in West Bend County."

Phil folded the paper he had lowered at their first announcement. "When did all this happen?"

"Today—when I took Joan to get Doc Burdock to fill her tooth. It's his farm." Bob rushed into details. Farm machinery was already there and the cattle herd, purebred Angus. Everything was fifty-fifty—half to the renter for work and half to the landlord for his investment. The dentist had driven them out to look the place over. There was a modern house. "And man, are those cattle nice! We went right back to town and signed the lease, one year with option of three. It'll cost a lot more than I've got for a share in it all, but Burdock will take a note. He's giving me this chance because I'm a veteran."

Bob saw Maggie's face light joyfully as he talked, but Phil studied the floor. "You'll have to hire a man to handle so much," he said. "Are you sure you're not biting off more than you can chew?"

"I've seen how they run eastern factories and things in the army. It'll work the same farming," Bob said. "To get ahead fast you have to go into things big and produce cheap—especially with cattle and grain prices going down." He paused, watching his father's face, and then said, "Clarence wants to go in on it in partnership."

Bob saw Maggie's gaze travel in a leap to Phil. Her words came quickly. "That'll be all right, won't it, Pa? It isn't every day the boys get a chance like this."

Phil did not look at anybody, but a flush stole over his face. While it was subsiding only Bob and Joan met each other's eyes, and he saw her mouth quiver a little. She liked his father very much.

Phil spoke and his words sounded like a pronouncement. "Clarence can do as he pleases. I can always find another renter."

"I know you built the house for Clair," Bob said, "and don't think

we don't appreciate your offering to do the same for us. It's just that we've found something better."

"It's all all right with me," Phil said. "I'd just be careful about jumping into anything that looks too good."

Chapter 71

Joan attacked ranch life by buying herself several pairs of boy's jeans, and Effie did not miss their trim fit or the stare and grin with which Clarence greeted her first appearance wearing them. Effie's legs and hips could not possibly have been squeezed into three sizes larger, nor would she have dared wear skirts as short as her sister-in-law.

Clarence had brought his best milk cows, and after her first trip to the barn Joan declared the building should be screened and the animals washed night and morning. "With all those flies around and hair falling into the buckets, the milk isn't safe to drink."

Clarence and Effie stared at her and then at each other uncomfortably. "It's all strained," Effie said.

"That won't get the germs out," Joan told her.

Only Bob laughed. "You've been around hospitals too long, chicken. We milk just like everybody else. You'll get used to it when you know how."

Joan took a pail with all the rest and went to practice on the gentlest of the herd. From corners of their eyes Clarence and Bob watched her approach the cow stool in hand. Joan stopped and looked her up and down, at her hoofs filthy with manure and legs and sides black with flies which Clara brushed off for her with a willow switch. Joan took the last step forward and doubtfully pressed the dusty flank. The cow obediently stepped back her leg. Joan sat down, reached for the teats, and was promptly cut across her face by the cow's tail. She leaped to her feet and out of range as if propelled. "God damned stupid bovine!"

Bob and Clarence howled, but Effie looked at Clara aghast and shut her lips in a tight line.

Flushed and already sweating Joan sat down again, working with one hand at a time, the other on guard against the tail. By the time the rest were done and Bob came over to finish her cow, she had squirted into her bucket to the depth of an inch.

While Joan was still trying to conquer the job of milking, autumn south-westerners began to blow, making September days dry and hot. A quick diskings up of sub-surface moisture held down much of the dust in the

Plainsboro region; but farther west and southwest, where thousands of sub-marginal acres had been broken in the war time gamble on three dollar wheat, the top soil stirred and rose. High aloft it drifted eastward as a yellowish brown overcast that dimmed the noon sun to redness of evening. When wind died at night, it settled in a film which lifted again with the morning breeze. The dust sifted in under doors and around window sills. Breathed, it dried the nose and throat. It gritted in the mouth and penetrated clothing to itch the sweating skin.

Joan, fastidiously clean from nurse's training, swept and mopped, but there always remained dust somewhere.

"There's no use spending all the time you do in this room," Effie informed her one afternoon, as Joan attacked the bathroom for the second time since morning. Joan closed her lips against replying and sprinkled more scouring powder on the lavatory. Porcelain should be white, not gray.

"A place ain't supposed to be speckless where folks wash dirt off themselves a dozen times a day," Effie said.

A wave of distaste rose through Joan on top of resentment for her sister-in-law's criticism. She snatched the family towel from the rack and threw it into the clothes hamper. "If Clara *would wash* instead of wetting her hands and wiping them, at least those would stay clean longer!"

She saw Effie stiffen. "You ought to be glad just to have a bathroom out here on the farm instead of a privy!" she said. Then she whirled and stamped away to the kitchen. Neither spoke to the other again until Bob and Clarence came in from field work and started conversation at the supper table.

A few days later the women did not address each other through the evening meal. Bob and Clarence looked at them and exchanged glances but did not mention the tension. Bob followed Joan to their room as soon after the supper dishes as he had turned out the horses to pasture. He found her sitting at the dresser with hair in pins and manicuring set spread open before the kerosene lamp, paring viciously at her nails. She did not look up. "I had a quarrel with Effie."

"I thought there had been something wrong with you two for the last week," Bob said.

"This happened this afternoon."

"Oh?" He sat on the edge of the bed near her where breeze from the window could blow over him.

"I guess she was no more to blame than I," Joan said. "I got back late from the hair dresser. She had about finished the chores and wouldn't speak to me. I tried to tell her I was sorry I was late while we cooked supper, and she made some catty remark about wasting money on marcls. I was

mad already from the eggs spitting hot grease on my arm, and before I thought I told her it wouldn't hurt if she gave more care to her own appearance. Then she really blew up. 'We couldn't afford expensive frills for me out here on the farm,' she said."

Bob flushed instantly. "Where does she get that stuff! These crops and cattle are as much ours as theirs, and it costs more for the three of them to live than the two of us."

Joan winced at his flare of temper. "It doesn't matter what they spend on Clara, honey."

Bob's face remained red and his voice angry. "Of course not, but she ought to see both sides of it. If she ever complains to me, I'll tell her off."

"No, Bob, please! You'll say things that you wish you hadn't." She turned full toward him, tears glistening in her clear eyes. "I don't want to be a trouble maker."

"You aren't," he said.

"I shouldn't have spoken nasty to her. I'll apologize and make up if I can, but I don't know how to talk to Effie. She thinks I'm too neat, and I'm scared I'll get careless like her." Joan paused abruptly and thrust out her hands. "Look at them!" They were roughened and brown stained on the inside with grime ingrained around the nails. "No matter what I try I can't get them clean."

Bob caught them in his own. "I'd love you without any hands."

Joan's lips began to quiver, and she jumped up and threw her arms around Bob. "It's this rotten weather—wind and dust blowing over you every day until you get raw. It doesn't stay like this all winter, does it?" She began to sob.

Bob held her close. "Of course not. Pretty soon the rains will come to start things greening, and then it will freeze up. And when spring comes with more rains, you'll see this country turn into a big, green garden." He stroked her hair until she had quieted. "Would you like to go back East for a visit?"

Joan shook her head vigorously into his shoulder and then raised her face. "No, I just got here." She tightened up her mouth into a smile. "I'll work it out with Effie, let her have the running of the house. She's lived on a farm for years."

The first of the rains Bob promised came that night, washing the sky clean to a cool blue; and in spite of coldness in both Clarence and Effie at breakfast, Bob felt the spirits of everyone wanting to rise. "Let's bring the folks over for dinner and show them the ranch while it's too wet to work in the fields," he said. Joan looked at him, and he smiled back her

understanding. With Phil and Maggie there they would all have to act natural again.

Bob had Clarence and Effie drive after them when they took Clara to school while he did the chores and Joan cleaned house and put a ham in the oven. When they returned all four together showed Phil and Maggie the huge barn and silo, the big cattle feeding pens; and Bob led out for appraisal their \$800 bull. Then they took them through every room in the rambling ranch house. "Next year we're going to put in a carbide plant and have gas lights," Clarence told them.

Phil listened to all without comment, while Maggie praised everything for them; but later when he was washing for dinner Bob saw his father standing at the lavatory turning the hot water faucet on and off with his mustache sucked between his teeth. Bob motioned Joan to him, and Phil looked up and caught them watching. He smiled and lowered his voice. "I'm going to have a bathroom put in our house; then Mom won't have to go out in the cold this winter. I won't tell her until it's started. She'd say it costs too much, but she's gone fifty years without one."

Joan and Bob nodded warmly. "You better be careful what you start or she'll be asking for a car and then an allowance like I want Effie to do!" Joan said.

"I'm getting a car as soon as Phillip is old enough to drive." Phil winked at Bob and made his voice stern. "It's all your doings, young lady. I overheard you telling Bob we needed a bathroom."

"It's about time you thought of it," she shot back, and Phil laughed as heartily as either of them.

After dinner Bob saddled two horses and took Phil to see the cattle. Once through the long lane into the pasture proper Phil stood in the stirrups to look steadily at the rolling hills. I haven't ridden through blue-stem this tall since early years in Kansas," he said.

"There's grass for twice the herd we got," said Bob. "Burdock sold off close while beef was high during the war."

They rode at a walk with stirrups occasionally rubbing, and all Bob's talk was of ranching. Clarence was handling the crop planning because he knew best about farming, and Bob the cattle. They were to calve in the spring, and he was going to save all good heifers for restocking. "I've been reading up on these Angus. They fatten out to more choice cuts of meat than any other breed!"

Phil agreed when he saw the black, blocky animals; but after they had ridden among them he said, "I believe you're wrong on your calving timetable. Some of the cows look to me like they have calves hid out right now."

Bob stretched up and looked over the cattle. He turned and rode through

them again, and when he rejoined Phil he was excited. "You're right, and won't this be something to tell them back at the house! Let's hunt up some of the little devils."

They separated by fifty yards and rode toward the better cover of a near ravine, eyes searching the tall grass. It was as Phil entered his second clump of trees that he saw a freshly dropped foetus. For a long moment **after he reined in he stared at it**; and when he did look toward his son, broad shouldered and alert in the saddle with his face turning from side to side in eagerness of his search, it was a still longer moment before Phil summoned him. When Bob rode up, Phil pointed at the ground. Bob stiffened, and his gaze remained fixed.

"One doesn't necessarily mean anything," Phil said, putting hope into his voice. "A critter might happen to throw its young anytime."

Bob raised his head and set his chin. "Let's find out."

They separated again and rode slowly, searching more carefully now than before; and in the course of an hour they found what the crows had left of two more undeveloped calves.

"We still can't be positive until a veterinarian has tested the herd," Bob said, stopped beside the second remains. His voice sounded desperate, and he kept his face averted.

"I know a quicker way," Phil said. "Find the renter who was here before and ask him."

They agreed to tell no one at the house until they were sure. Phil merely told Maggie he was ready to leave and Bob drove his parents home. He telephoned back to say he would be late returning.

Daybreak was in the east when Bob got back. Tired as he was he did not move from under the steering wheel after putting the car in the garage. Instead he lighted a fresh cigarette from the butt of his last and continued to sit. When Clarence entered a half hour later to get kerosene for the oil stove to start breakfast, the air was filled with tobacco smoke mixed with the greasy smell of the hot engine. He stared when he saw Bob still in the car, as red-eyed from his long drive as if he had been drinking. "What's the matter?"

Bob wet his lips and blurted it out straight. "We've got contagious abortion in the cattle."

"Good g-god!" The kerosene can slipped from Clarence's hand and banged on the floor. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It's been in the herd for several years, and Burdock, the son-of-a-bitch, soaked us!"

Clarence moved over a step and leaned against the fender. His face turned slowly white. "We'll be left in debt forever," he said.

"I won't," Bob told him. "Burdock has my note, but no matter what he does to me, I'll never pay him a dime on it."

Bob got out of the car, sat down on the running board, and told all that had happened. He had taken Phil and Maggie home, gone to Burdock, and the dentist had denied knowing anything about the disease. Bob hadn't liked his looks and had gone to the courthouse to find out who he had bought the farm from. Damned if it hadn't been Ezra Karns! He had owned it hardly a year. "I knew old Ez wouldn't tell me anything, so I drove to Fort Riley and got it all from Oscar." Bob had aroused Burdock from bed on the way back and cornered him. "Do you know what he said then, that Karns had taken him and he had taken us. It was business, and he'd spend ten thousand in court before he'd let us off one penny!" Bob's voice cracked on the last words. Blood vessels swelled in his throat and he opened and closed his big hands. "For a second I couldn't see anything but his face and sparks of fire. If he'd been in reach instead of across the table, I think I'd have taken him by the throat and bashed his head in. He knew it, because he got out of his chair and backed out the door."

Bob stared between his knees until he calmed himself. Presently he heard Clarence say, "We had just as well go tell the women." Bob nodded miserably. "Dad said if we got in trouble the man for us to see was George Foster. We'd better do that today, too."

From the Plainsboro bank the boys went directly to talk with Phil. He had told Maggie that morning, and already her eyes looked dry with worry when she opened the door. "How bad is it, boys?"

Phil watched them both try to make cheerful faces. "Don't let it bother you, Mom," Bob said. "We'll get out of it."

Phillip was in school, so there were just the four and they went into the living room. Maggie sat heavily in her chair, hands buried and twisting in folds of her gray apron while the boys told of their discussion with Foster. There was no use bringing suit. Foster said Burdock had money enough to law them out of court. The thing to do was refuse to pay their note and force the dentist to start proceedings. "The defense always has the advantage."

Phil nodded to that and leaned back from listening intently when they paused, for he thought they had finished.

"Foster also told us to put all we own in the name of someone we can trust," Clarence said. "Then if Burdock took it to court and did win, he couldn't collect. You or Hal could take over our property."

Phil met Clarence's eyes steadily and then Bob's with a look of concern and sympathy, but he did not offer to become involved. Instead he

said, "Burdock can get a judgment against you and keep renewing it for any property you ever do own."

Bob shook his head. "Foster says if we have to we can take advantage of the bankruptcy law."

Phil saw Maggie wince and look at him beseechingly at Bob's words, but he only answered, "Yes, you can do that."

When the boys were ready to leave, Phil walked with them to their car. There they told him their immediate plans—to notify Burdock officially that they were terminating their lease and after that to remain completely aloof. "We'll get a few calves at least, and there'll be a grain crop to harvest," Clarence said.

"We'll tell him nothing about income and let him worry about what's happening on his ranch until he comes to us," Bob added. "Foster says if we do that he may decide to settle for what he can get."

"That's fine," Phil told them, "but don't cheat anywhere. Keep your books absolutely straight, so if it goes to court you won't have to swear to lies. Anytime you do talk to him, don't make the mistake of losing your tempers and threatening him." They nodded and Phil with relief saw from their faces that neither blamed him for refusing to become materially involved, and he knew they must be remembering he had vowed to them from youngsters that he never would. Yet he was troubled deeply by Bob's remark about going bankrupt, and before they left he said, "I'd try not to claim bankruptcy. It leaves a smirch on a man's record the rest of his life no matter where blame lies."

Phil looked after his sons until their car disappeared on the road to get Hal's assistance. Phil knew Hal would feel obligated, and he regretted that Hal and Electra, the only completely happy pair in his family, could not be spared a share in the trouble. He felt weary of heart when he returned to the house and Maggie. He expected to find her weeping, but she had dried her eyes.

"Don't you think you should help them, Father?" she asked.

Phil shook his head. "I've already had my share of troubles. I warned them about jumping into anything that sounded too good, but they had to learn of life for themselves same as I did."

Chapter 72

That winter Burdock never once came near the ranch. Clarence would have chosen to make overtures for a lenient settlement, but not Bob. "He's a coward besides crooked or he'd have been out here," he said, "and shining up to the bastard won't help. Let him worry and the more the better."

He took such reckless, malicious pleasure in watching shingles blow off the granary that Clarence suspected him of loosening them. Half frightened Clarence said, "We ought to at least notify Burdock so he can have it repaired. Snow will drift in and warp the floor."

"I hope to hell it ruins it and wish the whole roof would go off," Bob told him. "I'm going to make that son-of-a-bitch's crookedness cost him every cent I can!" He refused to do any mending to fences, and when a neighbor's scrub bull got through a break in the wire, Bob left him with the herd until the owner hunted him down. "Jesus, I hope the calves are all normal from that," he said. "I'd give a hundred dollars to watch Burdock's face next fall when he sees some half-breed Jerseys!"

Through the raw winds of March the boys hauled off their half of the few calves they had got that winter and moved to Phil's farm as soon as it had been vacated by Emery Hendricks, who had rented it in Clarence's absence, leaving the remainder of the herd in care of a hired man sent out by Burdock.

The house was small for two families and without conveniences of the ranch. "Joan will never get along with Effie there," Maggie predicted, but even with dust storms of a dry spring Joan did not complain. Common trouble hanging over both families helped to keep the two wives reconciled. Though both felt the friction of their differing personalities, neither was willing to place the added burden of another quarrel upon their men. "We'll only be here three or four months till we can harvest our wheat off the ranch," Bob told Joan. "After that I'll do something else." He did not attempt to say what.

In late spring when Effie took down with influenza and Maggie hurried over to care for her, she found Joan carrying on efficiently as the nurse she had been in the army. The house was spotless, and at first it irritated Maggie that there was nothing to do but sit by the bed and visit when she had come to help. She was ready to sympathize with Effie against Joan until she came in cheerful and washed Effie's hands and face fresh for the noon meal. When she returned with a tray of cold orange juice, toast, and her sister-in-law's favorite soup, chicken broth stocked with bouillon, Maggie saw Effie's lips tremble after tasting a spoonful. "I'm awful lucky you're here," she said. "You'd make a dying person get well." Joan colored with pleasure.

But Maggie's quick eyes also saw Bob in and out of the house a dozen times during her stay, sitting down to a new book he had got on engine designing and then leaving it again.

On her ride home with Phil when he came for her she said, "I'm not worried any more for Clarence even if he is thin. He's back on our farm. It's Bob. He's worse than when first out of the army."

"No, he isn't," said Phil. "He's a good deal like I was at his age, ambitious and too impetuous. If our lines of interest hadn't been different as day and night we'd both have seen it sooner. He knows I'll still build him a house if he wants to farm. I'm holding off on renting to Hendricks while he decides. He understands himself better now and is trying to be more careful making up his mind."

"I wish he was raising a family to settle down with," Maggie said. "I spoke of it to Joan, and she said they didn't want babies! I think it's just her, and I'm afraid he won't ever farm after the rotten luck he had on that ranch." She peered at Phil, her eyes pleading. "You don't think the boys'll be left in debt like we were starting out?"

Phil drove a little way without answering, reviewing his trip that day to see George Foster while she was not home and considering whether to tell her at risk of disappointing her later. Foster had sat down with him in the same room at the small table where Phil had asked help on his mortgages during the panic, and in spite of wrinkles and white hair the banker's eyes were as sharp as they had ever been. "Burdock knows he can't collect," he said, "because he was here trying to sell your sons' note. I told him I'd take it at face value with his endorsement, but he wouldn't do that. Instead he offered to discount it. If he would do that, he'll compromise with them on it, but I don't know how far."

"I had been getting worried," Phil told him. "He didn't go to see them on the ranch at all."

Foster smiled slightly. "You have a couple of pretty husky sons, especially that Robert. Burdock is plain scared to go near them, scared they'd take it out of his hide." He had smiled again, more evidently. "I can't say that I exactly blame him."

Phil warmed again with pride in recollection. His boys were men in all the best ways. He took out his tobacco plug and started to bite off a chew, stopped and returned it to his pocket. He had also gone to see young Doctor Endicot about a reoccurring ache in his left arm. Endicot had taken over MacGregor's practice after the old physician had suffered a light stroke. Endicot told Phil his heart sounded tired, and MacGregor had come back to the office to confirm the diagnosis. "You're finished for all heavy work," he said. "You should never have gone back to it, and if I were you I would ease up on tobacco." There was no use frightening Maggie and probably best not to mention his visit to Foster either. He turned to her. "I don't believe the boys will be left in a terribly bad shape," he said. "We'll know in a couple more months."

When Foster later gave Bob and Clarence the information he had to Phil, he added a word of caution: "Your danger is that Burdock may sell

your note to someone who trusts you. Then you would be faced with choice of paying it or letting an innocent person take the loss."

"They should come to us before they buy it, shouldn't they?" Clarence asked.

"Anyone with a good sense of business would."

The warning frightened Clarence but aroused in Bob a more devilish desire to embarrass their landlord. In town one day he saw him on the street and headed for him with menacing strides, and that night at home roared with laughter as he told how Burdock had ducked through the nearest doorway. Clarence did not smile. "I wish you wouldn't do things like that. There's no use antagonizing him."

"The hell there isn't," said Bob. "If he's sold our note, he's sold it, but I want him to sweat every time he sees me."

When they were ready to thresh what little wheat had survived the drouth, he refused to let Clarence notify Burdock to have a checker on hand. "Let him worry about getting cheated for a change," Bob said. "I'm going to store his share of wheat in that leaky granary and pray it rains every night." He proposed they leave final settlement hang fire after harvest until Burdock came to them. "He'll lose some more sleep trying to figure out what we're up to!"

"No," Clarence said emphatically. "We'll haul ours straight to market and have a showdown. I want to be out from under this mess."

Stores were closing in Plainsboro when they brought in their last load of wheat, but Foster took their check for deposit into Hal's account when they rapped on the bank door. Still dressed as they had come from the field they telephoned Burdock at his office.

Bob was grinning when he left the phone booth. "He'd rather have met us some other place where there were people, but I told him we were coming to see him, and for him to be there. He'll try to bluff."

Clarence tried to smile a measure of Bob's reckless assurance into his own face. "You better do the talking. I don't know if I could face him down. I keep thinking of Effie and Clara if we get stuck."

Clarence could feel his heart beats quicken as they crossed the street, and his knees grew shaky on the stairs. Bob did not notice. He paused at the top of the flight with a grin spreading completely across his face while he rolled his sleeves high on his powerful arms. He thrust out his jaw, and pushed open the door.

As Clarence followed inside he saw Burdock sitting behind a heavy desk drawn solidly across the farther corner of the room. At sight of the hated, well-preserved face with horn-rimmed spectacles Clarence's fears boiled into rage, and he felt cornered but desperately strong. He took a quick,

overtaking step and crossed to the desk erect as a bar beside Bob. In overalls and open, sweat-stained shirts they stood elbow to elbow, and with eyes bloodshot from dust looked at Burdock.

The dentist seemed to measure them with return gaze. "Won't you be seated?"

"We didn't come to get a tooth pulled," Bob told him, and Clarence felt a surge of pride from his brother's hard voice. Bob took a folded data sheet from his shirt pocket and slapped it down on the desk. "There is your machine record of wheat threshed. Your share is in the bin. Now, we want to know what you're going to do about those cattle."

"You bought them," Burdock said. "I don't need to do anything."

"We're turning them back to you for exactly what we paid."

Burdock shook his head. "You bought fair and square."

Clarence felt a seething rush of blood to his temples at the last words. He saw Bob's hands shoot out and catch the edge of the desk, ready to shove it aside. "Say *fair* and *square* again!"

Burdock involuntarily leaned backwards. He moistened his lips but did not repeat the words. Instead he said, "I don't want any trouble."

"You'll release our note for interest or get nothing at all."

"I've sold your note."

Clarence's muscles tightened by instinct to keep his shoulders from sagging at the rush of fears and uncertainties coming back.

"Who did you sell it to?"

Burdock hesitated fractionally, and Clarence braced himself.

"To the bank."

In the upsurge of his relief at those three words Clarence could have laughed with joy. He took a quick breath and released it. "You're a god-d-damned liar!" he shouted.

A tint of pink crept into Burdock's face and deepened. Bob stepped back. "Let's go. He don't want to settle."

"Wait a minute," said Burdock. They stopped and looked back over their shoulders. The dentist's face was dark red now. "I don't expect you to take all your loss."

"We've told you what we'll do," Clarence said.

"That herd will have to be sold on the market and beef prices have gone down."

"That's your hard luck. We're broke."

"Then how the hell can you pay your interest!"

"We'll borrow it," Bob told him.

Burdock studied them, one and then the other. "Go find your creditor."

Clarence turned, took out his wallet, and extracted a check which Hal had signed for the exact amount. "We already have him," he said.

Burdock's mouth slackened open, but he promptly closed it and unlocked a drawer. When Clarence laid the check on his desk, Bob smacked one palm upon it there, deliberately and insultingly keeping possession until the note was marked paid and placed in his other hand. He surrendered the check then, but instead of turning away he handed the note to Clarence and with a reach of his long arms yanked the desk aside.

Burdock shrank clutching his chair as Bob advanced and planted himself squarely before him, his arms hanging loosely at his sides. "Now I want to tell you that you're a son-of-a-bitch!"

Burdock's eyes dilated behind spectacles and his face went livid.

"Stand up and take off your glasses if you're a man," Bob told him.

Burdock gripped down on his chair arms as if fearing he would be dragged to his feet. "I—I'm not going to fight."

With lips curling in contempt Bob looked down at him. He stooped, brought his face close in front of Burdock's, and twice more he repeated the epithet. Then he straightened and with Clarence walked out the door.

Chapter 73

The day after settlement, Joan told Bob she wanted to return East. Alone in their room she said, "We can't stay with Clarence and Effie now that the trouble is over—and I don't want to go back to living with your parents."

Bob pushed back the feeling of emptiness brought him by thought of her absence. He sat on the edge of the bed beside her. "I can understand that, darling. You're homesick and tired, and while I'm getting organized again it's a good time for you to make a visit. Maybe when you get back, Dad will have our new house started."

Joan did not move for a moment, and then she got up so abruptly that Bob stared at her and saw her tighten a quivering of lips as she turned away. He did not rise to follow her but sat watching mystified as she stood with her back to him at the window, and the starting void he had felt at her first words returned and spread. He saw her gaze sweep the field landscape baking outside.

"I don't want to come back to farming."

"I don't blame you," he said gently. "I know it's been discouraging. In a whole year we've made almost nothing and—it was my stupidity." He colored over the admission.

"It isn't the money, Bob." Joan's voice caught and rose a note in pitch. "I love you! I'd stick with you through wind and dirt! I'd grow old for you ahead of my day—but it isn't what you want either." She paused, turning her face toward him. "You're not like your family. You would need to love the farm as Hal does, but with you it's something you've just accepted."

Bob dropped his gaze before the unhappiness in her face and stared at the floor between his knees. "I don't know where I could give you more in the long run. I'm sorry as hell about that mess I got you into on the ranch and that won't happen again."

"But, honey, I don't want things at all. Let's go to a city someplace where you can go to engineering school."

"That would take money, too much of it," Bob told her. "From trying it once, I know."

"I'll get a job. I'll live in one room with you—"

"No!" Bob felt all his anger and despair for the year's failure burn his face and jumped to his feet. "I've told you I was sorry I made you miserable."

Joan's eyes flashed at his temper and a pink spot came into each cheek. "I'm not blaming you. Can't you think past one mistake when it's over with!"

"Well, I'll be damned if I'll have my wife paying my bills for me!"

For a moment they looked heatedly at one another, and the anger drained slowly from Joan's face. Spontaneously her palms turned toward him as if in supplication. "It was something you've always wanted—to be an engineer." Tears spurted into her eyes.

Bob rushed to her. "My God, what have we been doing!" He caught her in his arms and they clung to each other desperately, kissing and choking whenever they tried to speak. Bob gathered her up as if she were a toy and sat down with her in the huge, old-fashioned rocker. "You were thinking only of me," she whispered. "And you of me," he said. He looked long and tenderly at her, touching her shining golden hair. "You're my girl. We'll never quarrel again."

After Joan's departure East, Bob went home and lapsed into lassitude from which Maggie could not arouse even his appetite for her breakfast waffles and juice-running raspberry pies. The morning after his quarrel with Joan she had offered not to go. She said that she had been selfish and that she would farm with him, but Bob saw homesickness in her eyes and urged the trip. "I'll come back a-running to you after just a few days,"

she promised at the train. "No, you stay for a good visit," he had told her, "and give me time to think."

For the first week alone with his parents he sat about the house or porch, smoking numberless cigarettes and strolling off with a kind of dulled impatience when Maggie became solicitous or Phillip tried to ask him about Germans and airplanes. "Read your story books," he told Phillip shortly, after numerous attempts at questions; and that time he had scowled as he got up to leave. "The war is past." Thereafter when the boy tarried in Bob's vicinity it was only to stare at him.

"I wonder if Joan could have left him?" Maggie asked Phil.

"No, of course not," Phil said. "He gets a letter every day."

"That doesn't say they might not be breaking up. He's worried sick and he hasn't said anything about starting farming."

"No, and I'm not going to talk with him about that either until he wants to," Phil told her firmly.

He did mention it, however, when one morning Bob asked for the buggy to go see George Foster about borrowing money to buy horses and machinery. "I'll lend to you myself without interest," Phil said.

Bob shook his head. "If I go broke at this, too, I don't want you holding the sack. You'll be out too much just building us a house."

When he returned in the afternoon Bob did not speak of the results of his trip until the chores were done and the family had eaten supper. Then he asked Phil to take a walk with him. They strolled off past the barn through wood lot grove and down the dry grass slope to the pasture pond and sat on the bank together. Sediment had collected in the bed until the water was so shallow that the cows were standing in the middle. The dam and spillway were grown to short, dead weeds. But it was the pond in which Phil had taught the boys to swim, and on it Bob had run a small boat powered by a tin windmill wheel mounted on the mast in place of a sail and geared to a propeller.

Phil shook his head to Bob's offer of a cigarette. Instead he took from his tobacco plug a very small chew, tongued it up under his lip, and waited. Bob drew his knees up high. He sat with his hand that held his cigarette resting on one of them and began picking at the earth between his legs with a stem of weed. "The bank will lend me money," he said abruptly, "but I want your advice."

"All right."

"Foster helped me figure how much I'd need himself, and then when we were ready to make out the papers he asked me how bad I wanted to farm. That's the thing that's been bothering me. Joan doesn't like that

kind of life, and I don't care much for it either. So I decided to hold up a few days. The cost of everything is so damned high."

"There's no doubt about that in proportion to grain prices," Phil said. "I think Andy picked a poor time to buy a farm when he came back, but of course he's got his Spanish War pension to help him. On the other hand in your case you need to get started. If the state bonus passes this fall, that will help you."

Bob nodded. "A little, but it would still take an awful long time for me with only my bare hands to own a farm. By the time expenses and the landlord's share are taken out of a crop there isn't much left. I found that out on the ranch."

"I know, and a landlord pays taxes and insurance and repairs the buildings," Phil said. "Our soil don't produce as much as it used to, but you can still make some money farming if you plan well. Clarence never did and is still about where he started, but Hal has done all right."

Bob remembered what Joan had said about her brother-in-law. "Hal likes it and always has," he said. "He puts his whole heart into it."

"And you don't think that you could."

"No, and I told Foster so. We talked quite a while." Bob paused, hesitated, and gazed straight into Phil's eyes. "He told me he'd get me recommissioned back into the air corps, if I'd like to do that."

Phil looked back at him and sucked at his mustache for a quiet interval. "Would you?"

"I believe so. Flying was in my blood until I heard how it happened to—Shannon. Then I realized I had been killing people, and got the colonel to give me ground duty. I wanted to get clear out of the army quick as I could. I didn't think I'd ever want to go near another airplane. But it started coming back to me when I went down to Fort Riley to talk with Oscar Karns and saw the new planes, and today in town there was a barn-storming fellow giving rides. I felt so hungry to fly I got him to let me take his plane up."

Phil, listening, watched a flush creep into Bob's face and his eyes grow distance bright as he talked; and along with a heaviness of fear that came into his breast Phil felt envy and a sense of regret as for something big he had missed and now could never share. This was his son, and yet there was space between them. Andy, with the memory of his enthusiasm to join Teddy's Rough Riders and his experience in war, would have been better able to understand.

"I know you can't save money in the army," Bob said, "but they pension you after thirty years so you don't need to. I don't like to worry Mom to death though."

Phil shook his head faintly at the last statement. Unconsciously he looked at the horizon and above it. Forty years. Forty years ago and forty years from now. He sat without a word with Bob finished and waiting until he spoke again directly to him.

"You don't much like the idea, do you, Dad?"

"It's not that," Phil said. "I was thinking that in my lifetime we've gone from buggies into the sky." He paused and added, "And I haven't even bought a car yet!" He turned and he was smiling. He motioned aloft, and to Bob he looked suddenly incredibly like a young man. "You go to it, son. There's lots more room for you up there than on the ground."

Epilogue

Chapter 74

For a decade a lull of weariness rested over war-scarred features of a foolish world; but dumb forces which drive men to battlefields or monotony of daily toil, to sanctuary of reflection and mildness or brutality of murder, remained alive and busy. Peace of the aftermath was lethargy of exhaustion.

Despite ten years of decline in national farm income in returning to normalcy, 1928 was a good year for Kansas from plenty of timely rains. With summer about to close, the usually brown pastures were still sending up fresh grass, and the cattle had never looked fatter. Along fence-rows and in undisked patches of stubble sunflowers in profusion were dropping yellow petals and preparing to seed the countryside. Cornfields awaited frost with stalks still streaked green and hanging ears that had pushed kerneled ends out past their shucks. In meadows bees hurried from one fall blossom to another, and along graded highways coppered telephone wires flashed in the sunlight and hummed in low tones to streamlined automobiles skimming parallel.

On the Garwood homestead Phil came out upon the porch steps and stood and looked a long moment at the late afternoon landscape, softened and mingled in contour by faint, bluish-white haze. At length he turned his gaze to the garden and afterwards over the farmyard. Then he raised his hands and cupped them about his mouth. "Phil-I-lip. Hi-oh. Ph-hil-lip." When there was no answer he descended the steps, advanced to the garden gate and in perplexity looked about over Maggie's trim, weedless plot bordered as always with zinnias. "Where the devil is that boy?" he muttered. "We sent him after tomatoes an hour ago. He don't amount to a hill of beans!"

At that moment from across the garden there arose agitation in the quiet grape arbor, and Phillip's face came up through the foliage, stained with purple about the mouth. "I was just about to come in," he said. "I got the tomatoes picked."

Phil grunted. "Well then, bring them here. And you better save those grapes for jelly or your mother will get after you." He waited at the gate for the tomatoes, and in reaching to take the pail glanced down. "What are you doing with that book?"

Phillip hedged. "Just—reading."

Phil looked from the worn leather binding intently into his son's face. It was a volume he had brought from Grandfather Feldtmann's library, and it had been long since forgotten in the attic trunk. "Where did you learn to read German?"

"I'm taking it in high school."

"I thought it was Latin."

"I'm studying that too," Phillip said.

"Oh." Phil held out his hand also for the book. "You run after the cows. If Bob and Joan come tonight, we want the chores done early."

Phillip left at a walk, but across the fence into the pasture and out of sight behind the barn he halted. He looked once about him to make absolutely sure he was alone and then crouched, toeing an imaginary line for a track meet hundred yard dash. "Bang!" said Phillip and leaped forward. Yells of his schoolmates once more filled his ears, and he ran as he had the spring before, using the same final burst of speed which had won for him then. At the end of his race he dropped into a trot, chest heaving and his heartbeats shaking his body. A little farther on he intercepted and followed overgrown wagon ruts yet traceable where the country road had wound diagonally across prairie sections in the days before fences and surveyed highways. As Phillip's second wind came to him he settled down to a steady pace and held it until he entered the main ravine below the dammed tributary. From there on he walked, approaching each waterhole bent down and noiselessly, and raising his head with caution to peer over last fringes of vegetation. There might be early bluewinged teals about. If so he could come back for them with Shannon's shotgun after the milking. The holes had so badly filled with sediment from fields through the years that already not much water remained from the recent rains and there were no ducks. Phillip spotted the cattle lying under a cluster of young oaks that had grown from acorns washed down from the grove Phil had long ago planted below the barn. Phillip filled his pockets with rocks before he left the ravine. The cows were an aggravation to drive. Once aroused from rest and cud-chewing, they insisted upon stopping every step to eat. Phillip's throwing arm was accurate, and an egg-sized stone bounced off the rump of a dawdler saved many steps.

There was a car in the yard when Phillip arrived with the herd at the

corral, but it was not Bob's. Emery Hendricks and Jay Overbrook were sitting in it talking to Phil, who stood alongside with one foot raised and resting on the running-board.

Jay was speaking. "The Loubets, young and old, have run things in this school district long enough. We want your help, and if you'll come to the meeting we'll get you elected to the school board."

"No, sir!" said Phil instantly. "That's reason enough for me to stay away."

"But everyone knows you always stood for good schools and decent teachers' wages. People will vote for you."

Phil shook his head. "To my knowledge I haven't an enemy left in the world, but the best place to make some is in a country school or in church."

"Surely you want consolidation," Emery said.

"I don't care what changes are made. I haven't any more children attending, and it's not for me to meddle."

Phillip dawdled at the porch where he went for milk pails until the visitors left so that Phil would help with a full share of the milking. But once started on the job the boy strim-strammed at such speed that he finished his last cow well ahead of his father. Phillip was at the mirror beside the kitchen sink preparing to shave by the time Phil set his pail in the pump trough to cool and entered the house.

"Are you going away again tonight?" Phil asked, at sight of him mug and brush in hand.

"Yeah, I want to see the coach about basketball."

"What of Bob and Joan? I'd think you'd want to stay and visit with your brother."

"I doubt if they come tonight, and anyway they'll be here Sunday."

Phil began washing in the second washpan at the sink. "Well, don't stay out too late, and don't be running the wheels off the car. I don't want to buy a new one every year."

Phillip did not reply, and while Phil wiped he watched him spread lather over the scattering of beard beginning on his cheeks. "You'd as well put cream on your face and let the cat lick it off." He picked up Phillip's talcum powder can, sniffed at it, and wrinkled his nose.

Phillip watched him in the mirror, studying the reflection of his father's crown of coarse straight hair, white but still thick and parted down the middle. "Say, Dad, how did you ever get such nice hair waves in your wedding picture!"

Phil flinched and stared at him, then grinned from the side of his mouth and left for the dining room.

At the supper table Phillip stuffed food into his mouth and swallowed so fast he had finished eating and changed into clean pants and shirt before his parents were ready for their coffee.

"Be careful how you drive," Maggie warned as he left the house.

"Oh sure," he called back to her and was gone.

Phillip did not go to see the high school coach. Basketball was an excuse to get away. He went often to town because it became impossible at times for him to remain at home. Since Chet Freeman had married and taken Wart to Plainsboro to live, Phillip had been without a close rural friend. With only his parents for company, a pressure of loneliness sometimes filled him inside until it became almost stifling. The urgency which was a part of the sensation did not take any rational direction, and when the mood of unhappy restlessness came upon him, he simply departed whenever he could.

Phillip parked the car on a side street for the stalls were already filled along the business section. He went at once to the drugstore, passing through to the long room at the rear where high school students gathered. Above the rows of tables and booths the air was already hazy with smoke of forbidden cigarettes.

"Over here, Phillip," he heard Wart Freeman call, and located his friend's freckled face among some other boys' in a far corner. They made room for another chair in their circle at a coke-splashed table, scarred by cigarette burns. Phillip lighted up and ordered a near-beer which Wart spiked for him under the table. He smoked in concealment at home although he felt sure his father knew of it. For a while among themselves the group drank, laughed, and bantered loudly and in lowered voices discussed girls, while scrutinizing each as she came in. Phillip began to feel lightheaded and gay.

After a while one with ruddy-brown curls and dark eyes came in accompanied by blond Dorothy Haeckel. They stopped just inside and gazed about the room. Phillip looked across the table at Wart, and they both looked at the two girls. The girls looked back at them. Snickers broke out from the remaining boys at the table and spread along the lines of booths as Wart and Phillip got to their feet.

"You better be careful, Garwood!"

"Yeah, it looks bad—" The latter speaker clucked his tongue in mock disapproval.

"I guess we'll take a chance," Phillip said. "Columbus did!"

There were roars of laughter, and the girls were blushing by the time the boys had reached them and spun them around for a dash back through the doorway.

The two couples went to a talking movie and there for an hour with Dorothy's hand warm in his, Phillip was at peace with his strange, inner self in a make-believe world of romance and glamour.

Chapter 75

The Garwoods assembled in family reunion at the homestead next day, an annual event held on the Sunday following Phil's birthday. Andy and Vivian had also been invited. Norma Lee was away to her first year of girls' prep school.

Cars began turning into the farmyard about mid-forenoon except for Bob and Joan, who had driven up the night before from Sheppard Field, Texas, where Bob was stationed. He was in uniform with the gold leaf of a major. Electra and Hal had a daughter five now, adopted to give their blood son a sister; and Clarence had two boys, the last just out of diapers. Electra came early to help with the dinner, and Clarence, who lived nearest yet was always behind time, arrived last as usual.

The men folks gathered in the spacious sitting room in the old-fashioned chairs the family had grown up with. But there was also a radio which the children had chipped in to buy for their parents for Christmas and also a new, deep-cushioned sofa upon which Phillip was stretched lengthwise with a book.

As soon as all were settled, Phil passed out bottles of home brewed beer, cool from hanging deep in the well. They took on good heads of foam upon being uncapped, and the flavor was sweetish with a sting. Andy looked at Phil after his first swallow. "It never tastes quite like what we used to drink in town."

"No," Phil said, "but this is stronger."

"You'll be able to buy it again one of these days," Bob said.

"We'd just as well legalize it," Andy said, "and let the Government have the revenue that's going to the bootleggers."

"I don't think so," Clarence said, lowering his bottle. They had all had to speak loudly to be heard above scuffling and shouts of grandchildren in the adjoining dining room, and he turned his attention momentarily to the younger generation. "My God, can't you kids make a little less noise!" There was a furtive hush, and he returned to his theme. "Liquor is gone for good. The officers will keep making it a little harder and harder to get all the time, and I'm all for them. I don't say a man's gone to hell if he takes a drink, but I'd rather my kids grew up without it."

"Aw hell! It'll always be here," said Bob. "Too many people don't

want to do away with it. They just don't want you or me or somebody else to have it. It's only making hypocrites."

In his always mild manner Hal looked at him. "Just the same whiskey is not a good thing for the country, and if we haven't got rid of it altogether, the law has made it harder to get."

"Not around army posts," Bob told him. "There's plenty of the real stuff there. It just costs more."

Phil and Andy exchanged glances, grinned and tilted back their chairs, satisfied to be largely listeners.

"You hear talk of how easy it is to buy whiskey," Clarence said to Bob, "but always somewhere else. I don't see it around here."

"You could find it if you wanted to," Bob retorted. "I'll bet old man Darcy still gets tight Saturday nights. Where does he get it?"

"Oh well *him!* He'll drink vanilla extract and hair tonic if he has to. You can't change old soaks overnight. Maybe you can't ever cure them. It's when the new generation comes on you'll see difference."

"We-eell," said Hal, "I expect the young folks when they grow up will be pretty much like the old folks were."

Bob looked at him and nodded. "Sure they will. Human nature don't change." He turned back vigorously to Clarence. "If you wanted the law enforced, you'd report the bootleggers."

"I don't know any bootleggers."

"That's the trouble. People don't want to know who they are."

The men's voices were rising, partly to be heard above renewed hubbub of the children, and Phil smiled inwardly, wondering how much the beer was contributing to the growing warmth of the argument. He watched Bob raise a decisive forefinger.

"You'll see. Al Smith is wet and he'll win this fall."

Clarence struck the arms of his chair as he leaned forward. "How much do you want to b-b-bet!"

"Whatever you say, and we'll let Uncle Andy hold stakes." Bob turned to Andy, confident of his Democrat preferences. "Won't I win?"

"I wouldn't bet either way," Andy said. "There are too many issues besides prohibition." Phil nodded to that. "The agricultural question and Smith's Catholicism are both on the side of Hoover."

Clarence and Bob hesitated, looked at one another and grinned. They both felt a little abashed, made suddenly aware of the heat they had put into their views by the calm tones of parent and uncle.

"We'll bet another bottle of beer and let Dad stand the treats," Bob said.

When Maggie came to the doorway to tell them dinner was ready the

topic was the Ku Klux Klan and its anti-Negro, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic activities. She listened a moment to rumors that the Pope had belongings ready packed in Rome to sail to Washington and take over the Capitol if Smith were elected. "You and I know that's all rotten propaganda," Hal said generally to the group, "but you'd be surprised how many people believe or halfway believe it—enough to vote for Hoover."

"What we need is another strong leader to follow like Teddy Roosevelt was," Clarence said.

"I don't think the people will *follow* anybody very long in this country," Andy said. "It seems they have to be hoodwinked or herded along." Both he and Phil, who had been shaking heads mutually and amusedly in listening to the children, now nodded to each other.

At Maggie's announcement they all rose except Phillip, motionless on the sofa with his book, and she crossed the room to speak again to him. Aroused, he looked up and blinked as if awakened from sleep.

Bob glanced curiously at his younger brother. "How could he read through all this noise?"

Phil shook his head. "He'll stretch out right there by the hour; and if he can find an orchestra on the radio, he'll read and listen to music both at the same time. I never get to sit on that sofa!"

They took their chairs to the dining room and sat around the white-clothed table, extended with extra leaves almost from wall to wall and loaded with dishes. From the head Phil looked up and down it in satisfaction at heaped platters of roast beef, fried chicken and baked potatoes; at the sliced tomatoes, wilted lettuce, and cucumber rings; at the bowls of peas and corn and baked squash. He took up a big plate of hot biscuits piled to a pyramid and handed it to Andy. "Help yourselves everybody. The best way to lower the surplus is to eat all you can!"

There were some moments of busy food-passing activities filled with demands from hungry youngsters. When conversation took up again it was on the subject of the glutted grain market.

"We need to face it," Andy said. "We're raising more than the nation can eat." He grinned wryly at Phil. "You and I helped start people planting this Turkey winter wheat piled up in bins and elevators!"

"That would have come in time anyhow," Phil answered. "Your dad always said that some day we could feed the world."

Phillip spoke up at that. "There are plenty of hungry people in other countries to eat it all."

"Yes, but they won't pay us enough for it," Clarence said.

"Well, we'd better sell our extra for what we can get and make some friends."

Clarence snorted. "Fine friends they'd be! They aren't even paying us our war debts."

"My history teacher says they can't because there isn't that much money in the world."

"That's what he teaches you from books. People like him would have our country going broke."

Phillip looked at his brother, dark eyebrows arching slightly above his father's black eyes in faint expression of derision. He shrugged and returned to his food as if dismissing argument as useless. Phil, watching them both, looked last and longest at Phillip and felt a touch of both irritation and admiration. The kid was sharp. Nobody could tell him a damned thing though. He turned back to the men. "I think prices may rise a little toward November, this being an election year."

Hal stopped a juicy bite of beef before his mouth and spoke spontaneously. "I'm going to hold my corn. It's bound to go up. If Smith goes in we'll make corn whiskey, and if Hoover does we'll eat cornbread!"

A roar of laughter rose around the table, and at Hal's side Electra's cheeks glowed with pride for her husband's wit.

"I'm going to vote for Hoover," Hal continued seriously. "Not that I've anything against the Democrats, but Coolidge has kept times prosperous enough to pay off some of the war debt. When we've got a good thing, let's keep it."

"Yes, and Hoover's promised a special session of Congress to make things better for the farmers. We know the machinery we buy is too high in proportion to what we sell. I priced a binder last spring, and, damn them, they asked two hundred dollars! I went home and fixed up my old one. If we'd all do that prices would have to come down." Clarence's roving gaze stopped momentarily on his son. "Don't take so much of that salad, Rex. You won't eat it all."

"Another thing," Hal said. "Hoover wants a naval disarmament conference, and if they build fewer battleships, taxes won't be so high—"

"They won't disarm," Bob broke in. "They'll all go home from their conference and build more. You find out in the army that the world is armed the heaviest it's ever been. France alone has a million rounds of ammunition stored for every gun. We'd better be building enough ships and airplanes to guard our coasts while there's still time. There's plenty of nations that will whip us if they ever can."

"I don't really think they'll fight anymore," Hal said. "There's a president over in Germany now, and the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact."

"Wilson had the League of Nations, and he was a thousand years ahead of his day." Andy spoke so quietly that only Phil took notice of

his words, and looking at him saw he had not meant them for anyone and was staring at the wall.

"Don't kid yourself," Bob was saying to Hal. "War is coming and it will be a lot worse than the other one."

"I hope we stay out this time!" Andy told all. He spoke out so fervently that he brought all eyes to his face and a moment of silence.

"It's the only thing for America to do," Hal said, breaking it.

"If we could," Bob told him, "but we can't."

Clarence came to the defense of Hal, while Phil and Andy continued to meet each other's gaze in the solid harmony of friends whose only point of friction has been reconciled forever.

"Pass spuds and gravy," said Phillip loudly, interrupting everyone.

When the meal reached dessert Maggie brought in apple and cherry pies with a big bowl of whipped cream for them and a huge, dark chocolate cake thickly iced. She urged both pie and cake on everyone until by the time the last empty plates were pushed forward all were gorged to misery. Then Phil passed around the table with cigars. He hesitated a trifle behind Phillip's chair but placed one beside the boy's saucer as for the rest. The family looked their surprise and Maggie frowned, but Phillip lighted up like the others.

The men moved out to the porch with their smokes, and the mood had changed. Bob called them close about him with a guarded glance backward and around to make sure the women and children had not followed them. "I heard a good story at the officers' club—"

Peals of laughter, loud and long, floated back into the house.

After the dinner dishes were done, Maggie showed the girls her new quilt patterns. She would have one finished for each by Christmas. Later when they all took pails on their arms and started off for the orchard to pick peaches to take home for canning, Joan took Maggie's arm and dropped behind the others. Happy color rose into Joan's face when she turned to her as soon as they were out of earshot. "Mother," she said, "Robert and I are going to have a family."

Maggie stopped in her tracks. She caught her daughter-in-law's hand, and pleasure almost to tears filled her seamed face.

"We wanted you to be first to know," Joan said.

Maggie squeezed the hand she had taken and squeezed it again; and something mutual and binding flowed across the gulf both had always felt between them. "Bless you, dear, bless you," Maggie murmured.

They went side by side toward the trees loaded with fruit. From behind the barn new arguments carried across fall air, interspersed with chink

of horseshoes. "I've about concluded the only way to make it farming nowadays is to buy a tractor and do it in a big way."

"That'll raise grain surpluses with no horses and mules to feed."

"And it'll put the small farmer out of business and force him into town," Phil's voice replied. "Then you'll have to pay more taxes and higher prices to help him make a living there. Still, if I were a young man again starting out to farm, I expect I would buy a tractor."

Maggie and Joan listened to the men's voices and smiled.

On point of return with pails of peaches, the women were greeted by appearance of Clarence, awkwardly leading his wailing, starch-suited youngest to his mother for attention. Little Thornton had neglected one of nature's necessities in his devotion to play.

At sight of the pair, Maggie and Joan exchanged secret, smiling glances.

"Well, don't cry," Effie said. "Mother won't spank this time."

The tad dug his fists into his eyes in relief, while Clarence retreated for the barn.

About five o'clock the men came back to the house.

"It's near chore time," Hal told Electra. The children were called to the cars, but everyone waited in the yard long enough to see Bob and Joan off on their long drive back to Texas.

Maggie was so very tired when the day was over that she broke a lifelong habit of straightening house and sought Phil's side on the porch steps.

"Well, they're gone," she said. "Robert's so far away with his airplanes and Phillip is talking about college and—Shannon. I missed him so much! I wonder each time if we'll ever have the rest together again." The sunset swam slowly to her eyesight.

Phil reached and pressed her hand. "We can't tell, Mom. Somebody has to be next to go, and you and I are both living on borrowed time."

"Has it seemed long to you?" she asked.

"No, oddly enough it doesn't."

For minutes they sat without more words, Phil musing. He took out his tobacco plug and bit off a small chew. Phillip came down the steps behind them, passed silently and perched on the nearby cellar wall. The stars came out, shining timidly. It was a tender night with high, thin clouds and crickets which chirped as if summer were only beginning.

Finally Maggie stirred. "The world's getting so different nowadays I can't help thinking about the children, especially the grandchildren." Her voice sounded completely restored. "Seems like people never got

back to the same after the war. What do you think, Father? Oughtn't they go to church? Maybe if we went it would lead them."

Her plea reawakened in Phil some of his old irritancy. "I swore once when they stole my money for their damned building that I'd never set foot inside it, and I won't till I'm carried in!" He paused and at once felt calm again. "If you want to go, I'll take you over."

Maggie bit her lip. "I don't want to if you're going to sit outside in the car. It would make me feel uninvited like."

Phillip sat forward in listening and broke in. "Who wants to go hear old preachers rant!"

"Hush, son," said his mother.

"You can read and find out he don't tell the truth," Phillip persisted. "Darwin knows all about *evolution*!"

Maggie caught her breath at the dreadful word, and peered with apprehension into Phil's face. His thoughts had been turned to the past trial between Darrow and Bryan, and he meditated that Bryan in his day had been considered by many as dangerously radical as the scientist. Now his principles seemed too conservative.

"Maybe your Darwin does and maybe he doesn't," he said to Phillip after a little while. "Seems to me that if men of his calibre would use their brains to figure out where we're going instead of where we came from, it would do the world more good."

"How you going to read the future except by the past?" demanded Phillip triumphantly.

His father rolled his tobacco quid out into his hand and threw it away. "The person who studies the past too hard usually finds himself part of it before he's finished, and most of them never catch up again."

Phillip sat leaning forward intently for several moments but did not try to make answer. Instead he rose abruptly and went inside.

"I wonder what he's going to do?" Maggie asked.

"I don't know. He studied over what I said, but I had him stumped. I've seen a lot of myself in him lately."

A match flickered and a lamp flared up inside Phillip's room. Maggie stirred and stared at the silhouette he made on the lace curtains, sitting down with his book. "It must all be so bewildering to him with everything about him changing so fast. And those terrible things he reads! I'm afraid for him."

"He was born kinda on a dividing line," Phil said. "He'll have to choose the old or the new."

"Don't you think the old was better?"

"Maybe. I'll talk to him sometime." Yet in his heart Phil knew which

way the choice must fall. Well, let him study. It could do him no harm even though he might never learn anything truly.

While they sat together, Phil told Maggie how Electra had one night in his dugout come to him as a babe and asked her question: "Who is God?" "I didn't know then," he said slowly, "and I don't still. This business of preaching at you to make sure of heaven when you die. You know, Mother, I'd rather be able to live out the century to see the changes that will take place on earth. Why all that has ever been asked of men to make their own heaven right here is work and kindness to one another." Phil halted, startled by the utter simplicity of his last statement. Yes, it was as simple as that, yet the smartest failed to see it! People always sought some antidote outside themselves, set down and finished for them like heaven. They were afraid to say there was none, for then they could never have peace. Only the seeking—constant, miserable, endless searching with a little attending improvement—perhaps.

Phil started to turn to Maggie. "I wonder—" He stopped his speech and sank into deep silence. And as he reviewed his life his reverie became almost music. It had been an eventful age of stormy happenings, and his own small business of living in it so active. Yet out of it all had come little of what he intended, and the future held so much. Why could he not have exchanged fates with Shannon, whose life had been only well started? But what of death? Electra, his first wife, had been due to die; he had come to feel that as designed. He was due to die, too—sometime soon. Phil felt a little chill creep over him at the thought. The memory came back of Doctor MacGregor at Dean York's bedside and the physician's words: To die is nothing. MacGregor was buried also now, and Phil saw again the crowd backed up silent into churchyard and street after the building had filled, the miles long procession of funeral cars, and the mountain of flowers beside the grave. MacGregor had never swerved from the oath taken with his profession. Would he, Phil, ever have another chance at his own early dreams which, neglected, seemed to be outliving him? He could do better, starting again. Experience lay at the wrong end of the trail.

Like a morning horizon of distant hills his youth came back to him, with castles on which the sun had risen brightly across wooded crests of the Catskills and set forever on the prairie plains of Kansas. What was it that was ending, or was there no ending, only events? Was there no time only eternity like a screen on which things moved and happened? Again and unconsciously this time he started to turn to Maggie and again he stopped—gazing at her sitting with chin between her hands for the first time he had seen her so, staring into the darkness. She turned after his

movement, belatedly as if aroused, and smiled wistfully. Phil nodded as if to words. "It's been a great show, Mother. I wouldn't have missed it for anything." She put her hand in his, drew a long breath, and settled back with him when he did. He felt willing at last to resign himself to be a spectator for his remaining years, and marveled longingly at the greater show Phillip would get to see.

Then, while Phil mused on into the darkness with remembrances stealing about him and the world so wonderfully and mysteriously alive, there came a glimpse of something which looked like revelation. He caught at it, but as always found only disappointment. If there were for all the universe one creator with a supreme end in view, it was difficult to see how He could have made a worse mess of things with the lives of men. Still, through all his years there had been within him a goading force, some restless and unhappy will which he did not control and which bade him carry on. He had ceased to call it God after those early, unkind twists of events. He knew not whether to call it God now. Yet present it was deep inside everything that lived, those dumb, intuitive longings, and for better or worse it linked change inseparably to the march to eternity.

Chapter 76

John Phillip Garwood died and was buried in the little country graveyard where lie so many others with whom he neighbored and quarreled.

Young Phillip awoke hours early that fateful March day with instant presentiment of something gone wrong in the household. Voices were audible, one strange and the other Maggie's. He craned his neck above the covers and looked down the stairway. A crevice of yellow shone along the bottom of the kitchen door. Phillip slid out of bed, pulled on overalls, and hurried down the long, cold flight of steps. He entered the kitchen barefoot carrying his shoes and stopped, squinting against the light. Dr. Endicot was beside the oil cloth table on which he was closing his black valise, and before him stood Maggie, her eyes big and frightened.

"Your husband is a sick man," the physician was saying. "Just how sick I would rather not say until after my next examination. I'll come again at noon."

"He only thought he had a bad chest cold yesterday." Maggie's voice sounded like a protest.

Endicot looked at her soberly. "We'll know later," he said. "The medicine I gave him will make him rest."

Phillip did chores by lantern to be ready for his drive to high school on time, in rigorous respect for Phil's discipline against absence or tardiness. "No, I'll call Clarence," Maggie said, when Phillip suggested staying home. Phil drank fruit juice in bed propped against pillows. He seemed drowsy, and when Phillip looked in again before leaving he had gone to sleep. The boy left feeling less concern than he had at first and almost forgot it in the class room.

Clouds had gathered and were dropping cold, driving drizzle when school let out. The slippery country roads were treacherous, and it was dusk when he reached home. Several cars were in the yard, and on the leeward side of the grove he saw a parked airplane, wings staked securely. Bob and Joan! That thought with sight of the plane brought Phillip his first rush of alarm. He sprang out of the car and left side curtains flapping behind him to hurry to the house. Clarence met him at the porch. "We've been calling around for you. Where have you been?"

"I got stuck twice," Phillip told him.

Clarence took his shoulder and urged him inside to the family gathered in the kitchen, hushed and nervous. Down the hall past the bedroom door ajar Phillip saw a strange woman in white sitting beside the dresser. He gazed at everyone at once, too startled to comprehend.

"Is he—what did the doctor say?"

No one answered, but sight of Maggie coming toward him dry-eyed and frightened told Phillip enough. She took his hand and led him to the bedroom doorway. Phil lay unconscious and relaxed, and to Phillip he looked no different than he had that morning. He glanced from his father's face to the stranger nurse.

"Bob and Joan brought her with them from the city," Maggie whispered. "Pa doesn't know that they are here—it might scare him."

Phillip turned with her and in a daze followed her back to the kitchen. Death in terms of fact did not enter his mind.

The grandchildren had been left at Clarence's in care of Hal and Effie, so there was no household commotion. The family group ate supper around the oilcloth covered table with very little conversation or appetite and everyone unbelieving. The nurse drank a glass of milk with them, then returned to her station. "There will be a change before morning," was all she would promise. Clarence, Bob and Electra all urged Maggie to lie down and get some rest, but she would not be guided and went back to the bedroom also. Inside, she held up one finger to her lips and motioned Bob and Joan to the doorway for another peep.

Night closed down and dragged on. More and more the whole situation became trance-like and unreal for Phillip—the family sitting in circle

about the cast iron cookstove, heads occasionally nodding and jerking awake again, the dim light of lamps turned low both there and in his father's room, the strange and heavy silence in which a slightest rustle from the bedroom was cause for everyone to start.

Maggie brought them word when the hour did arrive. "Children," she called urgently. "Come!"

They rose instantly and mutely, and hurried into the bedroom. Phillip could detect no outward change in his father. He lay as he had been lying. Phillip took a place beside the bed and waited in wonder. Joan sat with the nurse and occasionally they whispered.

Presently Phil stirred and his eyelids parted. His gaze traveled slowly over the circle about him and came to rest upon Bob, and his eyes opened wider. "Robert!"

Phillip saw the family glance to each other with expressions suddenly aghast.

Phil moved his hand which lay outside the quilts, lifted it weakly and made a faint gesture in the direction of the cemetery.

Bob gulped and violently shook his head. "No, Dad! No!"

Phil's eyes continued to rest on him a moment, now curious and undisturbed. Then the lids closed and a faint, clairvoyant smile drifted about his face. His lips moved, and Phillip was drawn in closer with the others, all bending instantly to catch the words. "Doc MacGregor—he told—me. It's knowing how—" Phil relapsed abruptly, and slowly everyone moved back. The nurse glanced at her watch, entered a notation on her chart and filled her needle. She bent her head aside toward Clarence after the injection. Phillip was next nearest to her and caught her whisper. "He will rest again now, but he may struggle at the end. It might be better if your mother did not see."

Clarence shook his head staunchly. "He will go quietly."

A bit hysterically Bob ran his hands under the bedclothes. "His feet are warm."

The nurse gave him a forlorn smile. Joan, her eyes filling, rose and stole quickly from the room.

Minutes crept by, and a transformation began to manifest itself in Phil's features. Phillip watched in terrible fascination the breath shorten until it no longer stirred the gray strands of mustache and seemed not to enter beyond the lips. He never knew when it ceased entirely, only that the nurse bent forward and took the pulse. Then she turned and nodded. There was a wail from Maggie, and the sheet was drawn up to cover Phil's face.

With everyone out of the bedroom and the door closed, Phillip sat at

the dining room table. Dazedly he watched the stir of activity which broke around him, telephone calls and telegrams sent. Maggie was given an opiate by the nurse and put to bed with Electra. Maggie did not want to go and had to be led. "If Doctor MacGregor were alive he might have saved him," she sobbed. "Pa was asking for him."

Telephone calls began to come from neighbors offering help, and after a while there was a knock and Ezra Karns came in. He had come to sit with the family, he said. Ezra was stooped and walked with a cane, but was nimble for one in his nineties. His arrival astonished Phillip, who had never heard anything but hostility from his father toward this goateed little man. Yet now he had been first to come, arousing the hired man to drive him over through mud and rain which was turning to snow. "I'll make all your arrangements for grave diggers and pallbearers," he told Clarence and Bob; and suddenly his voice cracked with emotion. "Is—is there anything else I can do?"

The boys swallowed and swallowed as they thanked him and told him there was nothing more.

Even after Ezra's words, the tragedy still bore shallow, deceptive color for Phillip which persisted when Dr. Endicot stopped by on his way to another call and discussed the case.

"I never before in my practice saw a pneumonia crisis develop as rapidly. His heart must have been very bad. It is always a complication and the problem is to keep it going until the lungs clear. We included loads of heart stimulant in the hypodermics, but it just didn't respond. If he could have lasted through the night, he might have improved, but he would have been left bedridden."

This time tears spurted openly into Clarence's eyes. "He would rather have had it this way," he said almost fiercely. "Father was always that independent."

All the next day it snowed slowly and softly; and all through the day Phillip remained at sea with the drifting flakes. The weather had cleared by the funeral morning, and in church he sat impassive, a trifle pale but so unbending even during obituary and prayer, that people noticed and thought him cold. But within throughout the sermon his chest ached and his heart seemed about to choke him in desperate groping after something he could not quite understand.

The Masons conducted services at the cemetery, white like the countryside with clean, melting snow save for the one black pile of newly dug earth. The burial lot was already marked by family stone of gray granite engraved GARWOOD with Shannon's name and dates below. Even yet

Phillip could not fully accept the fact it was really Shan, so alive at departure, come back in the flag-draped box which had been buried unopened. Between the open pit and Shannon's low, white mound on its left remained space for a third interment.

Phillip stood with his family beside the plot in his pressed suit and new, black tie and watched white-aproned lodge men with bewilderment and awe through their ceremonial rites, while Andy as Master delivered his charge from the head of the grave and the Deacons stood with staffs locked in symbolic pyramid across it. The speaking of Andy's low, steady voice ceased, and the brethren moved past in solemn procession, dropping upon the half lowered casket their sprinkle of evergreen.

"Alas, my brother!"

Phillip's eyes which had been following them at length looked away over the crowd. His mind lost touch with the burial drama, in sudden recollection of a scholarship for which he had contended so fiercely through this senior year. With the thought he suddenly felt tricked and angry. His absences from classes now so late in the term and those days of unhappy and unsettled vagueness still to follow would give his rivals a margin of advantage he could never overcome. That scholarship would have meant college with its fun of books and learning—safe forever away from stinking cows and sweating field labor, and from farmhands with dirty stories. All at once his soul rose up in revolt at this trick which fate had dealt him. By God, he would go yet! He would find some way.

Then in the midst of his violent reverie a swift, light change to gentleness flowed unbidden into his heart. He felt his head cock into conscious listening. From the middle of the Masters résumé, words mysteriously intelligible fell upon his ears. They awakened strange echoes in his brain as if in some previous existence he had once beheld and possessed their intangible meaning.

"Perfection on earth has never yet been attained—"

Phillip listened intently with head lifted and canted to one side, but he heard little more, for it was the conclusion of the services. Clarence spoke to him and finally had to touch his arm to draw his attention to the waiting automobile.

THE AUTHOR

RUSSELL LAMAN was born on a farm in Cloud County, Kansas, in 1907, the son of an active Populist father and homesteading mother. After a country schooling and several years of teaching in rural schools, he was enabled to enter Kansas State University. Upon graduation in 1932, Laman entered the State University of Iowa and there received a Master's degree in English and Philosophy, a year later.

In 1935 he was appointed to the faculty of Kansas State, where he now teaches narrative writing. There he began fiction writing, only to be called to duty in the Army Air Corps for nearly four years. Serious work on *Manifest Destiny* was begun shortly after the War, and continued with the guidance of Hudson Strode and John Craig Stewart at the University of Alabama, and Mari Sandoz at the University of Wisconsin.

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